

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 37

Flamewing God

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Avatar

As Ji Ning began to head towards the Jadefire Realm of the Terror Starsea, his avatar sent word to Ninedust via the Palace of Ancient Truth.

“Ninedust, you are in the Jadefire Realm? I’m on my way.” This was the simple message which Ning sent.

The Palace of Ancient Truth had branches within all eight of the Sacred Cities of the Dao Alliance, and the mighty Ancients were the power behind it. Ning’s words quickly made its way to the Ancients and thus to Ninedust’s avatar.

“What?!” Ninedust was shocked. He never would’ve imagined that Darknorth would find out that he had entered the Jadefire Realm. In his heart, he couldn’t help but feel gratitude; everyone knew that the place was a deathtrap! Darknorth knew it as well, but he still rushed towards it without hesitating.

“Darknorth, I’ve been chased by Archon Silksnow into the Jadefire Realm but I never made that information public. If you’ve found out... that means it must be Archon Silksnow who spread the news. This is his plot!” Ninedust sent word back to Ning as well. “No matter what, don’t come here. Archon Silksnow is a madman. This is definitely a plot aimed at you.”

His message made it back to Ning’s avatar in Vastheaven Palace... but alas, it was of no use.

“Ugh, Darknorth is so...” Ninedust knew that he wouldn’t be able to dissuade Ning, and so his avatar within the Ancient stronghold immediately headed off to Vastheaven Palace.

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Outside Vastheaven Palace.

A man dressed in fluttering gray robes emerged from a tear in space, then stared at the distant Vastheaven Palace.

“Here I am.” The gray-robed man looked weatherworn, with anxiety

written on his face. "I hope I made it in time."

The gray-robed man waved his hand, causing countless drops of rain to appear in the air. The rain sprinkled down upon every inch of Vastheaven Palace, but the power within the rain was completely blocked by the barriers protecting the palace itself. The blocked power generated ripples which immediately attracted the interest of Emperor Solesky and Ji Ning's avatar.

"Eh?" Both emerged from the barriers, standing shoulder-to-shoulder as they stared off into the distance.

"Ha." Ning's avatar grinned. "You can head on back, big brother Solesky. Let me have a chat with my old friend." Ning's avatar then strode into the skies towards the gray-robed man.

Emperor Solesky smiled as well. He was also able to recognize who it was, as the gray-robed man had discarded his disguise and revealed his true appearance. It was indeed the Ninedust Sectlord.

"Ninedust." Ning's avatar walked over to stand next to the gray-robed man.

"Darknorth." Ninedust looked at Ning, his feelings rather mixed. Although he didn't wish for Ning to know that he was in great danger, he also felt very grateful for the way in which Ning had reacted upon finding out. This was what true brothers were like!

"I'm not too late, am I?" Ninedust asked. "Your true body hasn't entered the Jadenfire Realm yet, has it?"

"Not even close. I need to be careful when traversing the Terror Starsea. I can't just blink about willy-nilly like here in the Flamedragon Realmverse," Ning said with a smile. "It'll take me at least another thousand years or so before I make it there."

Ninedust let out a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness... eh?" Ninedust peered at Ning intently, rather surprised. "Why do I feel as though your aura has changed a bit?"

Although both were merely avatars, their auras were generated by their

true souls and their Daos. An evil cultivator's very aura would become evil and malicious! Since the true body and the avatar were linked together and analogous, the aura of Ning's avatar had indeed changed and become more powerful since last they met.

In the past, Ning was reserved and stately, like a blade that would reveal its sharpness when unleashed. Now, however, he seemed as vast and ineffable as the starry sky, but also as gentle as a drop of water. One couldn't help but like him upon seeing him. He possessed a certain deep magnetism.

"It was caused by an illusory art I created," Ning said.

"Illusory art?" Ninedust was surprised. "You've already reached such profound heights in the Dao of the Sword. How is it that an illusory art could have changed you this much?"

If one focused on illusions, one would generally gain tremendous charisma. Su Youji was a classic example of this. Ordinary cultivators who saw Su Youji would be uncontrollably intoxicated by her to the point of willingly following her as her servant. For those who had reached incredible heights in the art of illusions, their natural auras alone could seduce others without them even actively trying to do so.

Ning's [Unfettered Dreamlands] technique was an illusory art Ning had spent over half a chaos cycle working on. He had created it with the assistance of the Autarch's stone dais after he had delved into the many mysteries of the countless techniques he had studied. For it to have affected him was only normal.

"I was focusing on illusions recently and managed to make some progress." Ning smiled smugly.

"Alright. Enough about your illusions." Ninedust immediately said, "I came over here at full speed because I want you to avoid entering the Jadenfire Realm. You already know that this is Archon Silksnow's plot; why must you fall into it?"

Ning shook his head. "Plot? What sort of plot could he possibly have? Ninedust, why don't you tell me what you think he can be plotting?"

“Don’t underestimate him. He’s crazy.” Ninedust revealed an anxious look. “I was chased by him through the Terror Starsea. I fled in panic and used up pretty much all of my treasures. When we moved past the Jadefire Realm, I gritted my teeth and dove into it to save my own skin.”

Ning nodded slowly. Faced with certain death, it only made sense that Ninedust had jumped into a deathtrap. At least that way, he had a chance, no matter how tiny. If he didn’t, he would be doomed once Archon Silksnow caught up to him.

“I thought that once I dove into it, he would be afraid to follow me inside.” Ninedust shook his head. “I was wrong. That madman actually charged in right behind me.”

“Oh?” Ning narrowed his eyes. “He went in as well? Does he have a death-wish?”

“That’s why I said he’s crazy!” Ninedust said seriously, “The Jadefire Realm is a deathtrap which the Sithe set up during the Dawn War. Even though we beat them in the end, many of our major powers died in it during the war! Even though I charged inside, if I’m careful and take my time, I should still have a chance to find an escape path and be able to leave it... but now that Archon Silksnow has charged inside as well, I’m forced to continue my headlong flight. I’m being forced to straight for the more dangerous-looking places inside the Jadefire Realm... but he’s still chasing me! In the end, I ended up being trapped in a place that looks like some sort of prison.”

“Prison?” Ning frowned.

“I’m not too sure myself. All I know is that I’m trapped within a small area of just thirty or so meters.” Ninedust sighed. “Thankfully, there’s no danger inside the cell for now... and Archon Silksnow didn’t dare to continue his pursuit.”

“A prison-like place, eh?” Ning frowned pensively. He was a member of the Brightshore Kingdom, after all; he had immediately set off to acquire a map of the Terror Starsea from the Brightshore Hegemon. He was planning to use treasures to trade for it, but Hegemon Brightshore had just

given it for free. He now had maps from both the Hegemon and Daoist Bluestone, and as a result, he knew a bit about the Jadenfire Realm. The Jadenfire Realm was a deathtrap the Sithe had set up... and at its very center lay the prisons!

Quite a few major powers of the cultivator civilizations had been trapped within the Jadenfire Realm. Many of them were unable to escape! Once the Sithe had trapped enough major powers, they would unleash a single 'Decimatus Wave' and annihilate all of the prisoners! Hegemon Brightshore's records stated it thusly:

"The Jadenfire Realm's prisons are primarily spread across seven regions, and there are differences in them based on importance. However, the Sithe are all dead. I once scanned them from afar and found no signs of life within them... but the place is still filled with countless dangers. Although the Jadenfire Realm has been badly damaged, rendering its apocalypse wave unusable, there are still many formations and barriers that are strong enough to cause even Hegemons to die."

"The prisons?" Ning frowned. "Damn that Silksnow!" Even the ordinary prisons within the Jadenfire Realm were incredibly dangerous places!

"Don't worry, I'm fine for now," Ninedust said hurriedly. "I'm merely restricted to a thirty-meter region. So long as I don't touch any of the barriers, I won't be in any danger."

"But you are still in one of the Jadenfire Realm's prisons!" Ning was worried.

"That's why you need to stay away, Darknorth." Ninedust said hurriedly, "Archon Silksnow was crazy enough to charge in because he wants to use it to get rid of the two of us. He's cast all caution to the wind. He's already been inside for quite some time; by now, he probably knows quite a bit about that place. He has probably prepared traps for you! Once you go there, you'll be in a new and foreign place. It'll be easy for him to trick you."

"I'm no fool," Ning laughed.

"But he has the advantage!" Ninedust argued.

“Don’t worry. I’m not completely ignorant of the Jadefire Realm.” Ning shook his head. He had star maps from Daoist Bluestone and Hegemon Brightshore. As a result, he was quite familiar with the Jadefire Realm by now. “And... I’ve been wanting to get rid of him for some time now. If we just let that vile madman do as he pleases, he might end up causing some real trouble in the future. Best to get rid of him soon.”

“You...!” Ninedust was extremely anxious. “How can you...”

“It’s not like you don’t know what sort of temper I have.” Ning grinned.

“I knew I wouldn’t be able to dissuade you, but I still had to try.” Ninedust felt quite resigned. “Ugh. After all that talking, I still wasn’t able to budge you in the slightest! No matter what, safety first!”

“I’m not a hot-headed kid anymore,” Ning said with a laugh. “The only way I’ll be able to save you is if I keep myself alive.”

Chapter 2: Unexpected Surprise

Ninedust had failed to dissuade Ji Ning, but he decided to temporarily reside within Vastheaven Palace. That way, he would be able to keep in constant contact with Ning and be able to report details regarding his situation. This would be helpful to Ning in Ning's efforts to rescue him.

Within the Terror Starsea. Ning's true body was hastening through the region, his Protector in tow. This place was far too dangerous; even Ning had to advance through it with great caution. After roughly eight hundred years, the two finally made it to the Jadefire Realm.

"We arrived." Ning stared off into the front at the enormous, nigh-infinite vortex of fire which had appeared in the void. The flame vortex took up an enormous amount of territory. Each petal of fire was very beautiful, but filled with tremendous danger.

"Master." Whitethaw's eyes suddenly lit up and he spoke out.

"Yes?" Ning glanced at Whitethaw.

"I've been here before," Whitethaw said.

"You've been here before?" Ning was delighted. He suddenly remembered that Daoist Bluestone had acquired this Sithe Protector in the Terror Starsea! Whitethaw had been charged with protecting an extremely high-status Sithe, which in turn meant it wasn't that surprising for them to have visited the Jadefire Realm before.

"Yes." Whitethaw nodded. "My original Sithe master was invited here before. This place which you cultivators call the 'Jadefire Realm' was known to the Sithe as the 'Seven Flaming Hells'."

"What else do you know?" Ning was overjoyed. This truly was an unexpected surprise. The more he learned about the Jadefire Realm, the easier his visit to it would be.

Whitethaw held nothing back from his new master: "This is a deathtrap which the Sithe laboriously built up. My master was merely invited here to view it, and so I only have a cursory knowledge of it! The heart of the

Seven Flaming Hells are the seven core prisons within it. Those seven prisons are paramount, but there are a large number of ordinary cells as well! All of them, together, form the 'Seven Flamehell Annihilation Formation' which can generate a type of destructive black flames. Aside from Autarchs, virtually anyone touched by these destructive black flames will perish."

Ning was in awe as he nodded slowly. "Those black flames... we cultivators referred to them as a wave of 'Decimatus Flames'."

"However, the Sithe ended up being defeated in the war. That means the Seven Flaming Hells were probably attacked and destroyed, along with its formation," Whitethaw said. "Thus, Master, there's no need for you to worry about the Decimatus Flames."

Ning listened as Whitethaw continued: "Part of those prisons are damaged, but part are probably intact. If you wish to save your friend, Master, you must first find out where he is. If he's trapped in a damaged prison, you'll have a chance to rescue him! But if he is within an intact prison... rescuing him will be very, very difficult."

"In addition, your enemy 'Archon Silksnow' is also present. Based on what you said, Master, he's not inside the prisons. There are a large number of passageways outside the prisons," Whitethaw said. "These many passageways are filled with many traps and barriers. The Sithe once controlled them to ensure that cultivators were unable to escape. Many died in those passageways or were blasted into a prison during the battles. My guess is that Archon Silksnow is definitely planning to use those mechanisms to trap you, Master."

"Passageways? Prisons?" Ning nodded.

"When my original Sithe master was invited to come here, the receiving Sithe warned him never to fly within the passageways! He was only to walk on the ground. That way, even if he did run into some of the barriers, at least he wouldn't be sent into the prisons." Whitethaw smiled. "No matter how dangerous the situation on the ground might seem, he was not to fly at all."

“The ground is filled with many dangerous barriers and formations, but they aren’t capable of killing Hegemons. It is precisely because of how dangerous the ground looks that many cultivators choose to fly instead, seeking to avoid those dangers.” Whitethaw continued, “But while it is true that you will encounter much fewer dangers while flying... the ones that you will encounter are lethally dangerous ones! Even Hegemons might perish.”

Ning nodded slowly. If it hadn’t been for Whitethaw telling him this, Ning would never have been able to guess at all of these secrets.

“You have to be careful, Master. I’ve only been to this place once with my original Sithe master before,” Whitethaw said, “And I’m only familiar with a few of the passageways which my Sithe master once took. As for the more important secrets of the prisons, I wasn’t privy to those.”

“You’ve told me enough. This is excellent.” Ning smiled.

Even when the Jadenfire Realm was in perfect shape, so long as one walked without flying one wouldn’t encounter any dangers which could threaten Hegemons! Now that the Jadenfire Realm was in bad shape, things would be even safer. Neither Archon Silksnow nor the Ninedust Sectlord had died in the passageways, after all.

“Hmph. Silksnow, so long as you stay outside the prisons, you won’t be able to threaten me no matter how you plot.” Ning felt much more relaxed, and a cold light flashed through his eyes. “I’m not going to die here, but you are.”

“Let’s go inside, Whitethaw,” Ning said. Whoosh. The two of them immediately flew into that enormous vortex of fire.

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The enormous vortex of fire was pitch-black inside. After Ning and Whitethaw entered, they felt as though they had entered a completely different world.

“Eh?” Ning saw clusters of fiery passageways up ahead. The countless fiery passageways were all interlinked, almost like an enormous beehive.

During the Dawn War, this had been a Sithe base. The Sithe would be able to retreat here and recuperate in safety... but the cultivators who dared barge inside would all perish.

“I can sense them.” Ning stared towards a certain direction, then reached out with his right hand and pointed. “Silksnow is right over there.”

“Master, these passageways are all interlinked. You’ll be able to reach any prison from any passage,” Whitethaw said.

“If that’s the case, then we’ll choose that passageway.” Ning began to fly towards the passageway up ahead, the one which he felt would lead him towards Archon Silksnow.

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“He’s here?” A skinny, white-haired, white-browed man was seated in the lotus position within an empty space that was merely three hundred meters in size. Archon Silksnow was able to sense that his realmship was resonating with a realmship part. A look of excitement flashed through his oily green eyes: “Daolord Darknorth actually came. Heh heh... they really are good friends.”

Although he felt that Ning would probably come, this place was still the Jade Fire Realm. Not everyone would be willing to brave such great danger for the sake of a friend.

“Good. Daolord Darknorth... I might not be able to beat you, but the Sithe can.” Archon Silksnow stared towards the flames, a smile playing on his lips. “I’ll wait for you right here. Let’s see what you can do. I’m completely surrounded by lethal traps. So long as you come towards me, you’ll definitely activate them. Once you do, you are dead.”

The destruction of the Sithe had resulted in many of the barriers and mechanisms being revealed. There was no longer anyone in charge of them, which was why they could no longer remain hidden!

Archon Silksnow had chosen this region because there was a terrifyingly strong formation here. It was so mighty that just staring at it would cause one to shudder. Archon Silksnow knew that if he touched it, he would

instantly perish! Thus, he carefully skirted the formation and then hid himself within the void besides it. He then set up a few formations of his own to help mask and disguise the truly dangerous one.

“I’ve already disguised the trap. There’s no way you’ll notice it at all.” Archon Silksnow revealed a smile. “You’ll definitely touch it... and even if you don’t, I’ll arrange for you to do so.”

He knew that someone like Ning would definitely be quite crafty. It wouldn’t be easy to trick him, and so he had made many plans to ensure that Ning would fall into at least one of them.

His advantage lay in the fact that he had been the first to enter the Jadenfire Realm!

“Heh. You want to save your friend, eh? Heh heh heh... you are dead. Dead!” Archon Silksnow eagerly awaited Ning’s arrival. It had been a long, long time since he had felt this excited! The most dazzling Daolord in all of history was coming, someone who had destroyed the Silksnow Fiend Palace... and today, Archon Silksnow was finally going to get rid of him.

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Whoosh. Ning flew into the passageway, then stepped onto the ground.

“Be careful, Master. As you follow the passageway, you’ll run into a fairly high number of barriers and traps.” Whitethaw was by Ning’s side, protecting him at all times.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. Ning began to carefully advance through the twisting, flaming passageways. The passageways were a thousand meters in diameter, and a number of mechanisms were clearly visible within them. Ning and Whitethaw were able to easily avoid touching them.

After walking for the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning suddenly blinked. He then glanced at the nearby Whitethaw. “Whitethaw, didn’t you say there were plenty of dangers and mechanisms here?” They hadn’t encountered anything dangerous at all.

“Uh...” Whitethaw felt rather awkward. “I guess... maybe the Sith are all dead and no one is in control... which is why there are no dangers?”

“Heh.” Ning laughed when he saw the awkward look on Whitethaw’s face. “Alright, let’s go.”

The two of them continued to traverse the passageways with ease, moving closer and closer towards Archon Silksnow.

Chapter 3: Ji Ning and Silksnow

The winding, flaming corridors stretched off for countless kilometers. They had been nightmares for cultivators during the Dawn War, but now that they were damaged and were no longer actively controlled, the barriers within had been dramatically lessened in number.

The flames beneath the feet of Ji Ning and Whitethaw suddenly transformed to form a giant flaming head that was three hundred meters long. The flaming head opened its great mouth, preparing to swallow Ning and Whitethaw whole.

“Break!” Whitethaw stomped down angrily towards the ground with his white, fur-covered feet.

Boom! The furry stomp delivered a strike of inconceivable power, instantly crushing the flames below and shattering the flaming head.

Ning chuckled when he saw this: “We finally encountered a trap. This was the first one for us.”

“Don’t worry, Master. Leave these mechanisms to me,” Whitethaw boomed sonorously.

“Haha, I’m not worried at all.” Ning laughed, but he couldn’t help but sigh secretly in amazement as well. No wonder the highest-ranking Sithe had all wanted Sithe Protectors like this. Whitethaw was definitely comparable to supreme Archons in power! Even when Ning fought against it with all his might, Ning was still unable to gain any advantage at all.

And this wasn’t the most impressive thing about it. What was really impressive was the fact that the golem was meant to protect and defend. In raw power alone, it was comparable to Hegemons in might! This was the reason why Ning wasn’t able to gain any advantage even when using his Heavenbreaker stance with all his power.

Aside from possessing overwhelming power, it was also capable of soft and flexible attacks. It was capable of tying down any foe, even Hegemon-level ones. It could also stand in front of its master, helping its master face

any dangers.

It must be understood that not even an actual Hegemon would necessarily be as effective as a Sithe Protector when it came to actually guarding someone.

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Ning and Whitethaw continued to follow the passageway. Whitethaw used his absolute, overwhelming power to block and crush any of the traps they activated. In truth, these mechanisms weren't all that powerful; they weren't even able to force Whitethaw to enter his 'flexible' mode.

Whoosh. Countless flames suddenly sprang up beneath Ning's feet, surrounding him from every direction and from above him as well. Flames were spinning everywhere, almost as though they had just been trapped in a cage of flames. The spinning flames came together to form a strange script which was clearly accumulating a surge of terrifying power.

Ning's face tightened slightly. This was the first time since entering this place that he felt a bit of danger. Clang! Ning pulled a pair of Northbow swords from the sheath on his back, bringing them to the ready.

"Master, leave it to me!" Whitethaw let out a low roar, slamming his giant furry palms in every direction in a series of furious strikes.

Boom! Boom! Boom! It was like a wave of palm-strikes striking out everywhere. Each palm was actually slightly stronger than even Ning's full-force Heavenbreaker stance! More than ten palm-strikes were unleashed in the blink of an eye, causing the cage of flames to start to crack and crumble. Moments later, the cage exploded violently and then completely collapsed.

The Protector lowered his hands, a stolid and straightforward look on his face as always.

"Pretty impressive." Ning was beginning to like the golem more and more. When Daoist Bluestone had traded this golem to him as part of the deal for the Omega Sword Dao, Bluestone had said that these Sithe Protector golems were extremely rare and of slight interest to even

Autarchs.

“I’ll probably have to rely on Whitethaw if I want to rescue Ninedust,” Ning mused to himself. “It is much better at facing danger than I am, after all.”

As they continued to advance from one fiery passageway into another, Ning could sense that he was gradually growing closer to Archon Silksnow.

Six days passed in the blink of an eye.

“Almost there.” Ning turned solemn. Although he had the absolute advantage in power, Archon Silksnow had proven his determination when he had chosen to risk his life and enter the Jadefire Realm. Ning wouldn’t be the slightest bit over-confident against such a crazy foe.

Ning watched carefully as he continued to walk forwards. “Over there!” Ning’s eyes narrowed as he saw the man. A few hundred million kilometers away, a skinny white-robed, white-browed man was seated in the lotus position in a tiny empty space that was surrounded by flames. His oily-green eyes were fixed upon Ning as well.

Although flames and other things were between them, to experts like them mere matter was unable to block their line of sight. Previously, they were unable to see each other because they were too far away and too many mechanisms were present. Now that they were less than a billion kilometers away from each other, they were able to see each other clearly.

“Silksnow,” Ning said as he walked forwards.

“I really do admire you.” A gravelly voice rang out in the area around Ning: “You threw yourself into the Terror Starsea and then into the Jadefire Realm, all for the sake of just a single friend! Daolord Darknorth, I already admired you for your strength. Now, I admire you for your courage as well.”

“I admire you greatly as well. You are an Eternal Emperor, but you were willing to risk it all in diving into this deathtrap. If I chose not to come, it is possible that the end result would be that you and Ninedust would both

die in here,” Ning said. “For an Eternal Emperor to be willing to enter into a suicide pact with a Daolord... I’m truly awed by your madness.”

Entering the Jadefire Realm was easy. Leaving was difficult! In the past the Sithe had allowed countless cultivators to enter without impeding them, then killed them once they were inside! Thus, although Archon Silksnow had been able to survive his entrance, actually leaving alive would be a thousand times more difficult. It wouldn’t be possible to simply take the original route back, after all.

“Suicide pact? You underestimate me too much,” Archon Silksnow said with a cold smile. He had a realmship, meaning that he was much better at staying alive than other Archons.

“You drew me here for the sake of trapping me, yes?” Ning continued to walk forwards, a smile on his lips. “You aren’t strong enough to do it yourself. Your plan is probably to use some of the terrifying mechanisms within the Jadefire Realm to do it yourself. If my guess is correct, you should be surrounded by incredibly terrifying traps.”

“Indeed. I’m surrounded by terrifying traps. Tens of them. Hundreds of them!” Archon Silksnow laughed wildly, “And that’s why you should stay far, far away from me. The closer you get to me, the sooner your death will come.”

The two continued to speak from a great distance, while Archon Silksnow concealed his true thoughts and his true plan against Ning. Closer, closer... just a little bit closer... Archon Silksnow eagerly awaited Ning’s arrival. He knew that given how proud Daolord Darknorth was, there was no way he would flee without even seeing the traps.

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Archon Silksnow had his schemes, but Ning had plans of his own. If Whitethaw hadn’t told him some of the secrets of this place, Ning would be proceeding with much greater caution. Now, however, Ning knew that so long as he didn’t fly into the air he wouldn’t be attacked by any of the truly deadly mechanisms of this place.

“Silksnow, in the end your schemes will all amount to nothing,” Ning

mused. However, he still instructed Whitethaw cautiously, “Whitethaw, stay ahead of me.”

“Acknowledged.” Whitethaw led the way, while Ning followed Whitethaw from behind. He was being cautious for the added security it would provide, but also for the sake of lulling Archon Silksnow into a sense of complacency.

The distance between the two began to shrink. Eighty million kilometers. Sixty million kilometers. Fifty million kilometers. Thirty million kilometers...

“The closer, the better. That way, Daolord Darknorth will suffer even greater repercussions from the shockwave.” Archon Silksnow felt his formerly-calm heartrate begin to pick up, hammering against his chest like meteors. “Closer...”

Ten million kilometers. Eight million kilometers. Five million kilometers...

“Eh? Why isn’t he attacking me yet? Hurry up and attack!” Archon Silksnow waited eagerly. “Once he attacks, he’ll definitely hit the barrier in front of me.” If Ning didn’t attack, he would have to come up with a way to trick him into touching the barrier.

The distance between the two had shrunken down to merely a million kilometers.

Whoosh. Suddenly a wave of invisible heartforce swept out, instantly passing the distance between them and falling upon the white-browed Archon Silksnow. This was the [Unfettered Dreamlands], and a beautiful dream-world appeared before his eyes.

“I’m finally invincible! Hahaha... I’m the ruler of this realmverse! Hahahah!” Archon Silksnow was seated upon a throne. Below him were Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, Hegemon Netherlily, and the other major powers. They were all waiting on him subserviently, causing him to laugh with delight.

However, a moment later a look of terror appeared in his eyes. He

realized that he had been trapped inside an illusion!

“Break! Break! Break!” He furiously struggled mentally, but he could sense the world around him clinging onto his mind like mud, making it hard for him to escape. He continued to struggle, and finally with a ‘pop’ he managed to break through.

He had shaken free from the [Unfettered Dreamlands], regaining his mental clarity and control over his body.

Chapter 4: Eruption

“Capture him.” As soon as Ji Ning had unleashed his heartforce illusions, he had ordered the Sithe Protector to advance.

“On it.” Whitethaw transformed into a streak of light, running through the flaming passageway at high speed. They were less than a million kilometers away, an extremely short distance to the likes of them. Whitethaw had almost instantly charged over to Archon Silksnow, his feet still firmly planted on the ground. He hadn’t flown a single time! He reached out with his great furry right hand, clawing towards Archon Silksnow. But right as he did so...

Swoosh. The blurry-eyed Archon Silksnow suddenly vanished into thin air, a strange vessel appearing in his place. This was an ancient and unadorned vessel, covered with specks of rust and decay that spoke to its great age as well as the tremendous damage it had suffered. Despite that, it was still able to move at incredible speeds. It instantly retreated at high speeds, avoiding Whitethaw’s strike with ease.

“Eh?” Ning’s face tightened. He could sense that when Whitethaw had reached out, Archon Silksnow had still been trapped by the illusions. “Is there someone else here besides Silksnow?”

Inside the fleeing realmship were two figures. The two figures looked absolutely identical; both were white-haired, white-browed copies of Archon Silksnow. One of them had a lost look on his eyes, while the other was quite clear-headed.

“Erupt!” the clear-minded Archon Silksnow commanded.

Boom! Archon Silksnow had long ago set up a masking formation to hide the terrifying trap present, as well as a few other simple formations that would be able to activate the trap. Now that Archon Silksnow actively chose to detonate his formations, they instantly erupted with their full fury! The powerful detonations instantly smashed against the truly deadly trap, causing an absolutely enormous eruption of power.

Rumble... a terrifying burst of destructive power instantly sprayed out in

every direction like a dark-red wave of flames. Everything it touched was evaporated, including even spacetime and karma itself.

Although Archon Silksnow had first fled in his realmship before detonating the attack, the dark-red flames almost instantly crossed the ten million kilometers of distance and smashed against the realmship.

BOOM! Not even the realmship was able to continue to fly steadily, with the force of the blast sending it tumbling. As a vessel meant for flying between realmverses, it was extremely valuable and generally only owned by extremely high-ranking Sithe. When Autarch Bolin had assaulted the Stone Hellephant Wall, only two of the many Sithe there had been in possession of realmships.

Autarch Bolin had taken one away, while the other had been destroyed in the fighting. However, only Autarchs were capable of destroying realmships with ease. They were built to be extremely sturdy. Thus, even though the realmship was hit with a terrifying amount of power and was sent careening through the air, it remained undamaged.

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“Not good.” Ning sensed that terrifying wave of destructive power wash out towards him from hundreds of thousands of kilometers away. The dark-red wave of flames instantly swept through the area with such power that even Ning shuddered.

This wave of power was enough to cause even Hegemons to perish.

“Master!” Whitethaw immediately began to run towards Ning.

Just as Ning was about to defend against it, he noticed something odd. He immediately sent mentally to the Protector, “Don’t panic. It can’t hurt me.”

The massive, dark-red wave of fiery power blasted out in every direction... but it maintained a distance of roughly thirty meters from the ground. Although it blew straight past Ning, it merely swept past him and the ground of the passageway. This region of thirty meters above the ground was completely safe.

Northbow swords at the ready, Ning raised his head to stare at the dark-red wave of flames as it swept through the skies above him.

“So it’s true. As long as I continue to simply walk on the ground, I’ll be perfectly safe.” Ning grinned. “The Sithe were probably worried about misfires, as these traps don’t differentiate between friend or foe.”

“Master!” Whitehaw arrived next to Ning.

“Come, let’s go find Archon Silksnow. Don’t let him escape,” Ning barked. Swoosh! Swoosh! The two continued to run forwards across the surface of ground. Soon, they were able to see the distant realmship bathed in those dark-red flames.

“What!? That vessel remains undamaged despite suffering an attack of that magnitude?” Ning revealed a puzzled look. He carefully inspected the vessel, examining what it was made out of. It seemed to be quite similar to his own realmship part, and the resonance was coming from that direction as well.

Could it be an actual realmship? Did Archon Silksnow have an undamaged realmship!? Ning was rather stunned by the implications. Both he and Ninedust knew that Archon Silksnow probably had realmship parts of his own, as that was the only explanation for the resonance, but neither of them had even dared to imagine that the Archon might have an actual realmship part! The thing looked damaged, but it was at least serviceable. The price of the realmship was truly incalculable!

“Master, that’s a realmship! I’ve seen them before. My master wanted one, but he couldn’t afford it,” Whitethaw sent mentally. “One realmship is worth twenty of me.”

This was no joke. Whitethaw didn’t have to explain why realmships were so valuable! It must be remembered that it was extremely difficult and time-consuming for even Hegemons to travel between realmverses. Realmships, however, made the passage extremely easy and simple. Any Hegemon would be willing to pay almost any price to acquire a realmship. In fact, four or five Hegemons would be willing to join together into a consortium to buy a realmship! In reality, however, they were never for

sale.

Emperor Waveshift was willing to be generous enough to offer the Crimsonwave Temple to his homeland, but he would never have been willing to hand over a realmship. Only Autarchs were wealthy enough to give those things away!

“Silksnow actually has a realmship!” Ning’s eyes turned bloodshot with excitement. “I have to get it! I have to!” Ning had originally simply been wanting to get rid of a potential future threat, but now he felt great desire for the realmship as well.

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The realmship was sent spinning through the air by the dark-red flames, but it quickly managed to stabilize. The two bodies Archon Silksnow were both on their feet.

“I didn’t expect that Daolord Darknorth’s illusions would’ve reached such a level of power. Not even my avatar was able to resist it. It took a full second before it woke up. Even my true body was trapped for an instant!” Archon Silksnow glanced at his avatar. “How terrifying. Daolord Darknorth is improving at a terrifying pace.” His oily green eyes flashed with cold light. “I have to kill him right away.”

“Unfortunately... things went to hell. My plans were completely wrecked.” Archon Silksnow shook his head. His plan had been to let his avatar wait there by itself, while his true body was aboard the realmship and hiding within an estate-treasure carried by the avatar. He wanted to use his avatar to lure Ning in, while his true body lay in wait.

He didn’t expect that Ning would immediately use illusions to attack. When the illusions struck, both his avatar and his true body were simultaneously trapped by it! Generally speaking, if a true body was trapped by an illusion the avatar would be trapped as well. This was because avatars were weaker to illusions than true bodies were! However, the reverse wasn’t necessarily the case.

In this situation, the avatar had taken a full second before regaining consciousness. Archon Silksnow’s true body, however, had almost

instantly woken up after briefly falling for the illusions. By the time Whitethaw had reached out to grab the avatar, Archon Silksnow's true body immediately made his move.

Only one thought had been in Archon Silksnow's mind at that time: "I absolutely cannot fight Darknorth in close combat. If I do and he traps me in his illusions, even for a heartbeat, I'll suffer a heavy wound or even die."

"Screw it. I'll set the blast off now." Archon Silksnow no longer dared to try any other tricks. He was terrified of Ning's illusions, and so he immediately detonated the nearby trap. Given how powerful that trap was and the fact that Ning was just a few hundred thousand kilometers away, he felt that it was very likely it would be able to kill Ning!

"He's dead, right? He has to be dead." Archon Silksnow put away his avatar and then took control over the realmship as he turned to carefully scrutinize the area he had just fled.

Suddenly, two figures appeared. One was a youth carrying a sheath on his back, the other was a furry white creature. These two were moving in pursuit of the realmship at terrifying speeds on the ground, the flames just overhead above them.

"Daolord Darknorth?!" Archon Silksnow was shocked. "He didn't die?!" The Archon didn't understand it. He managed to survive the blast because of his realmship, but how did Daolord Darknorth survive? Even top-grade Eternal treasures would've been instantly shattered by such a blast. Even Hegemons would've perished!

"Flee." This was the only thought in Archon Silksnow's mind. He immediately controlled his realmship and sent it into a headlong flight.

"Silksnow, don't run!" Ning let out a furious shout when he saw the realmship begin to accelerate.

By now, Silksnow didn't dare to let Ning get close to him. The illusory art Ning had used had truly frightened him, and he was completely focused on using the realmship to throw Ning off his track.

Chapter 5: Foreordained Results

“Chase him down!” Ji Ning and his Whitethaw both transformed into streaks of light, chasing at high speed while staying on the ground-level of the flaming tunnels. However, the escaping realmship was moving farther and farther away from them.

“It’s too fast. The realmship is able to fly much faster than we can.” Ning stared off into the distance, his face tense as he continued the pursuit.

“Don’t worry, Master. The passageways are filled with traps and mechanisms. If he moves slowly and carefully he can avoid some of them, but he’s flying like a madman! He covers a hundred million kilometers in an instant without even looking at what’s up ahead. He’ll definitely run into some of them. Once they activate, they’ll slow him down if not kill him outright,” Whitethaw said.

Ning nodded. They were supposed to travel through a dangerous place like this with caution. The only reason why Ning dared to run forward at full speed was because Whitethaw was blocking for him up ahead.

“Archon Silksnow is protected by the realmship. That’s why he dares to fly about like a madman,” Ning mused.

Boom! Suddenly, a blast of power burst out from up ahead. Ning saw that a region of ten thousand kilometers up ahead had been trapped within a spatial vortex. The rippling spatial vortex manifested circles of light that howled through the area and chopped through everything within it. Each circle of light was like an incredibly sharp buzzsaw.

The howling buzzsaws of light turned that entire region of ten thousand kilometers into a deathtrap.

“Good.” The distant Archon Silksnow noticed what had happened behind him. He instantly felt a great sense of delight: “Die! Die! The only reason why I dare to move so fast is because I’m in a realmship. How dare the two of them chase that quickly? They tripped a trap, eh? A pity that only the golem fell into that trap. It’d be perfect if Daolord Darknorth fell in as well.”

“GWAAAAR!” Faced with all those buzzsaws of light, Whitethaw raised his head and let out a furious bellow. He then lifted his fists up high, then brought them smashing down towards the ground with his full power.

BOOM! The rippling region of space began to shudder after receiving this titanic strike. As the space began to crumble, even the buzzsaws of light began to vanish.

“What?!” The fleeing Archon Silksnow was unable to accept this. “Even his golem is that powerful?!”

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Whitethaw led the way and Ning followed from behind. Whitethaw was able to attack with both dominating power as well as supreme flexibility. Even Hegemons would envy his physical gifts! He was simply incredibly good at staying alive. This was why he had survived even though his original Sithe master had perished. Although he was perhaps inferior in terms of power and attacking techniques when compared to Black Emperors, he was even tougher and more resilient than them. This was why the Sithe named these types of golems ‘Protector’ golems.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Whitethaw barreled through one barrier after another, and none of the eight he rammed through were able to do anything to him.

BANG! Suddenly, a loud explosion rang out from afar as a jade-green burst of light erupted. It was like dazzling jade moonlight, filled with satin-like gentleness. When the fleeing realmship rammed into the jade-green light, the power of the jade moonlight was fully released. The jadeship was instantly smashed backwards and sent tumbling through the air.

“That’s more like it. We already ran into eight of those things. How could you run into none while flying through the air?” Ning was delighted upon seeing this. “The most dangerous traps the Sithe created were all placed in the skies.”

The realmship continued to careen backwards through the air. The traps in the air truly were incredibly powerful. “W-what the hell was...” As the

realmship was smashed backwards, Archon Silksnow was briefly dizzy by the force of the collision as well. After recovering, he hurriedly took control of the realmship once more to continue his flight.

“He’s catching up.” Archon Silksnow couldn’t help but frown when he saw the two figures chasing after him from behind. “I was able to pull away from them, but they just closed the distance in an instant. Ugh... Daolord Darknorth’s golem is incredibly strong. Its able to rip through all of those formations with raw force, while my realmship has no offensive capabilities and can only endure those attacks passively.”

Whitethaw actively attacked and destroyed the traps and barriers he encountered while continuing his advance. The realmship, however, could do nothing but passively endure the attacks it encountered. Each time, it would be sent flying backwards. This had a dramatic affect on its speed. Was Archon Silksnow supposed to charge out and attack the traps like how the golem had? He didn’t have that level of courage.

“I refuse to believe it. The Jadefire Realm is filled with many dangers. The Sithe filled this place with mechanisms and traps! There’s no way that a single golem will be able to burst through all of them. Once his golem is destroyed, he’ll have to rely on himself to take on those dangers.” Archon Silksnow still felt that success was within his grasp. In truth, this was part of his plan as well.

He had prepared multiple plans to deal with Ning. The first was for him to wait for Ning to launch the attack! Alas, Ning’s sudden usage of the illusory [Unfettered Dreamlands] had completely ruined that play, forcing him to actively set off the trap in advance. Unfortunately, he still hadn’t been able to kill Ning.

His second plan was to rely on the realmship to flee. The realmship was incredibly sturdy and good at keeping its occupants alive. If Ning dared to chase, if he wasn’t careful he would hit one of the traps and would end up dying. Archon Silksnow’s realmship, however, would be able to endure the hits.

And of course, he had a third ‘desperation’ plan...

“I hope I never have to use the third plan.” Archon Silksnow looked at the two streaks of light chasing after him, a mixed look in his oily green eyes. “Daolord Darknorth has always outperformed my expectations. I made so many preparations to set up the stage for his death, but he actually reached an incredibly terrifying level in illusions! He’s also gained an insanely strong golem. Judging from how it has burst through those traps with such ease, this golem is definitely far more powerful than me. Where in the world did Daolord Darknorth find such a golem?”

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The realmship continued to flee. Ning and Whitethaw continued to chase.

Given how both sides were moving at maximum speed without carefully examining the dangers up ahead, they naturally ran into one trap after another. Ning and Whitethaw ran into more of them, and the realmship ran into fewer. Ning, however, wasn’t slowed down by the traps he found. The realmship, in contrast, was. As a result, the realmship hadn’t been able to shake Ning off, and the two remained fairly close to each other.

This pursuit lasted for two full days.

Whoosh. As the speeding realmship passed through the flaming passageways, it suddenly encountered some sort of invisible power that was extremely sticky in nature. It instantly wrapped itself around the realmship, causing it to dramatically slow in speed before finally coming to a complete halt... and then be pulled backwards and then forwards as if it was oscillating.

After just two oscillations, it came to a complete halt and was stuck there in midair.

“What’s going on?” Archon Silksnow stared in shock from within the realmship. “Move! Move! Hurry up and move!” He tried to will the realmship into moving, but he felt as though the entire ship had been trapped by some sort of invisible force that prevented it from moving at all.

“Have I been trapped?” Archon Silksnow grew anxious. “Break through!”

With but a thought, he summoned a saber to manifest outside the realmship. He didn't dare to go outside the realmship himself, as the realmship had clearly been trapped; if he exited it, he might very well die. He used the saber to try and tear through the invisible force binding him from outside, but as soon as the saber appeared it also became bound by the invisible power, rendering it completely immobile.

"B-but..." Archon Silksnow was stupefied when he saw this. "The realmship isn't moving, and my treasures won't move either." Archon Silksnow turned to look behind himself. He had previously pulled away slightly from Ning and Whitethaw, but both were drawing near yet again.

"If they catch up... given how terrifying Daolord Darknorth's illusions are, I'll probably die. If so... then it's time to go all out." Archon Silksnow narrowed his eyes, immediately manifesting six arms with six sabers in them. With but a thought, he appeared outside the realmship as he struck out with all six sabers.

The invisible power once more swept over him. "Break!" Archon Silksnow struck out with all six sabers, but they were only to strike out to a distance of thirty meters before they brought to a halt by that invisible power, which had continuously pulled at them.

That invisible power wrapped itself around Archon Silksnow as well. He tried to struggle, only to find that he couldn't move at all.

"W-what the hell type of trap is this?!" Archon Silksnow was furious and frantic.

"Silksnow." Ning's voice was calm now. "This time, there's no escaping."

Ning and Whitethaw both walked over, raising their heads to stare at the airborne realmship and Archon Silksnow. Both of them had been 'stuck' in midair and were unable to move.

Ning wasn't surprised. They had remained on the ground and so there was no way they would encounter any excessively powerful barriers, but Archon Silksnow had been flying through the air this entire time. Sooner or later, he would fall victim to a powerful trap! As soon as the two sides had begun this chase, the result had been foreordained.

“Come over, if you have the courage to do so.” Archon Silksnow was completely unable to move, but he was still able to circulate his Immortal energy and cause his voice to echo in the air.

Chapter 6: Archon's Fall

"I'll wait for you right here. Come over and kill me," Archon Silksnow said with a cold laugh.

"I wouldn't dare follow you inside." Ji Ning stood off in the distance, staring at him. "It'd be pretty miserable to be trapped there for all of time."

"Hmph. If you don't come in... I might be trapped here, but I'll continue to live. I'll be able to live a very, very long time. After 108,000 chaos cycles, you'll probably have failed your Daomerge and perished. I, however, will still be alive! My friends will probably come here and figure out a way to rescue me. Sooner or later, I'll break free!" Archon Silksnow stared downwards at Ning, his white brows fluttering and a look of madness flashing in his eyes. "So why don't you come over. Come over and kill me!"

"I'm not going to... but you are still going to die today." Ning shook his head.

"Eh?" Archon Silksnow's face tightened, his gaze turning colder. "Oh? I'm quite curious as to just how you think you are going to kill me."

Ning stood there within the flaming passageway, head raised. He waved his right hand, causing a Northbow sword to appear.

"Break!" Ning stabbed out with his sword, causing sword-light flow like a wave of water. The sword-light came together in overlapping layers which stabbed straight towards the distant midair Archon Silksnow. In the instant that the Northbow sword stabbed it, it transformed to become a million kilometers long! It seemed to pierce through the skies themselves as Ning struck out with his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop. This was his most penetrative attack, and the attack which Ning decided was best-suited for dealing with this sort of invisible binding power.

Slash! When the sword struck out, it pierced straight through the binding area and was immediately impeded by that invisible force. Ning's sword began to move slower and slower; after stabbing in a mere hundred kilometers, it came to a complete halt and was unable to advance any

further.

“Eh?” Ning frowned. What an odd trap that was. His sword was only able to stab partially into the field, with Archon Silksnow still tens of thousands of kilometers away from it. Although the trap had bound Archon Silksnow, it also made it very hard for Ning to kill him.

“Haha, you aren’t even close. You can’t even touch me!” Archon Silksnow laughed coldly.

“You’re trapped inside and wrapped up so tightly in the air that you can’t even move... but you can still laugh? I really do admire you,” Ning said as he began to consider his options.

“Hmph.” Archon Silksnow let out a cold snort. In truth, he did feel quite miserable. He was completely bound in midair and wasn’t even able to move a finger. It was as though he had been paralyzed into a statue. He couldn’t even move his mouth to speak aloud and was forced to rely on using Immortal energy. How miserable a life would this be?!

And so the skinny, white-haired, white-browed Archon Silksnow just stood there frozen in the air, that tattered and ancient realmship next to him while Ning considered how to defeat the formation.

“Come out!” Ning tried to physically push the Northbow sword deeper, but the sword didn’t budge at all. Raw force was of no use! Archon Silksnow wasn’t even able to move. If Ning used some of his sword-stances to unleash his most powerful attacks, he might be able to make a bit of progress, but with his sword stuck like that he wasn’t even able to use any stances.

“Get back here.” Ning willed for the Northbow sword to shrink, and it quickly began to grow smaller in size. “Grow!” Ning tested out expanding the Northbow sword in size, but within the trapped region the sword was constantly being impeded by that invisible force. He could shrink it, but he couldn’t expand it.

Ning shook his head. He had no choice but to shrink his sword and to put it away.

“Master, this trap is meant to bind foes. After the foes are trapped inside, the Sithe would come to either capture them or kill them with ease,” Whitethaw said. “However, we’re unable to assert control over the trap and so we have no choice but to burst through it forcefully.”

“Do you have a way to do that?” Ning said.

“Let me try brute force first,” Whitethaw said.

“Brute force?” Ning’s eyes lit up as he glanced at the golem with surprise. “Right. Give it a try.”

Whitethaw was a golem and had brute force in spades; in strength alone, he was at the Hegemon level. Neither Ning nor Archon Silksnow had a chance to break through with raw power. They were cultivators, after all; they primarily relied upon their insights into the Dao, not raw strength! Golems, however, generally had ridiculous amounts of power, as they primarily relied on the overwhelming physical might of their golem-bodies. To them, the Dao was secondary.

“Break!” Whitethaw reached out with his furry right hand. His hand expanded dramatically as he reached into the trapped region and began to be impeded by that invisible force.

Ning watched closely, as did the distant and immobilized Archon Silksnow.

Boom! The hairy white hand slowly forced its way in, tearing past the impeding power.

“What?!” Archon Silksnow was shocked.

“Good!” Ning was delighted.

A smile appeared on Whitethaw’s stolid face. He then reached out with his other hand as well, appearing quite confident. His two large furry hands travelled nearly a hundred kilometers in an instant.

“How is this possible? How?!” Archon Silksnow was beginning to panic.

Ten thousand kilometers... the two giant furry hands moved closer and closer towards Archon Silksnow and the realmship, with the Archon’s face

becoming grimmer and grimmer.

“I’m... actually going to die here.” Archon Silksnow’s facial expressions twisted. He knew that once he was drawn into the estate-world, he would definitely perish.

Time flowed on. Finally, one of the giant furry hands reached the realmship and latched onto it. The hand was so large that it was able to completely cover the vessel, separating it from that invisible binding power.

“Come here.” After getting a firm grip over the realmship, Whitethaw forcibly drew it into his own estate-world treasure.

“Now it is your turn.” Whitethaw turned to look at Archon Silksnow, reaching towards him as well.

“Brother Silksnow, I’d like to invite you into my estate-world. Let’s have a little chat.” Ning sent out his heartforce which easily pierced through the invisible power of the trap, surging forward to completely surround Archon Silksnow. Ning was worried that Archon Silksnow would transform into his invulnerable snowform when Whitethaw moved to grab him, making it impossible for Whitethaw to get a hold on him.

“I lost.” A forlorn look appeared on Archon Silksnow’s face as he sensed Ning’s heartforce take effect on him and watched that giant furry hand stretch out to him. He was still bound by that invisible power and completely unable to escape. His voice echoed throughout the empty area, “Daolord Darknorth, I lost. I have roamed the Flamedragon Realmverse for countless years, and I never thought that I would’ve died by your hands. However... you are the most powerful Daolord in all of history. To die by your hands is nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Darknorth, today I shall die... but soon, you shall die as well. Without question, you will die.” Archon Silksnow’s oily green eyes stared at the distant Ning, a crazed smile on his face. A moment later, his gaze grew dull and flat as all signs of life fled his body. Clearly, he had committed suicide by collapsing his own soul and truesoul.

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Within Archon Silksnow's estate-world. Two figures were seated there in the lotus position. One was Archon Silksnow's avatar, the other was Emperor Bloodcloud's avatar.

The aura of life began to vanish from Archon Silksnow's avatar. The death of the true body meant that the avatar would perish as well. "Brother Bloodcloud, I lost. You know what to do." This was the final thing Archon Silksnow's avatar said before dying.

"Silksnow..." Emperor Bloodcloud's avatar watched him die, then nodded slowly. "Yes, I know what to do."

Emperor Silksnow's avatar suddenly exploded into countless tiny pieces, the godsense contained within it being completely extinguished as well.

His avatar had committed suicide by self-detonation to ensure that there was no way Ning would know who he had been. Once an avatar broke apart, it was nothing more than a compilation of treasure fragments; there was no way to tell what they had originally belonged to.

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An ordinary-looking chaosworld at the very margins of the Flamedragon Realmverse. Black clouds rolled about this world. Many Emperors were present here. This was where the Emperors of Silksnow Fiend Palace had chosen to hide. This place was filled with many barriers, ensuring that even if Ning did attack they would have ample time to flee.

"He died." Emperor Bloodcloud sat at the peak of a mountain, a look of grief in his eyes. "Brother Silksnow died."

Archon Silksnow had simply been far too crazy. Emperor Bloodcloud wasn't willing to accompany Silksnow in his madness, but had been willing to help Silksnow out. Thus, Emperor Bloodcloud had sent an avatar alongside Silksnow in the latter's scheme to kill Ji Ning.

The end result, however, was that Silksnow failed.

"Daolord Darknorth... do you think you've reaped a great fortune now that the realmship is in your hands?" Emperor Bloodcloud smiled coldly. "Soon, the realmverses and otherverses closest to the Flamedragon

Realmverse shall all learn that you, Daolord Darknorth, are in possession of a realmship as well as many other treasures.”

“Hmph... sometimes, owning too much treasure can be fatal.” Emperor Bloodcloud’s voice was cold. He was absolutely certain that the Hegemons and other major powers of the various realmverses would go crazy over the chance to acquire a realmship.

“This is the last gift which Silksnow prepared for you... a fatal gift.” Emperor Bloodcloud had an eager look in his eyes. He eagerly awaited the day where Darknorth would be killed.

Chapter 7: Realmship

Ji Ning stared at Archon Silksnow's corpse as it lay there in the air above the flaming passageway. Ning would never have been able to feel at ease, knowing that some a crazed demon was still around and alive... but after actually killing him, Ning didn't feel much much joy, only a sense of relief.

At least one potential future source of trouble had been gotten rid of.

"One of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities," Ning murmured softly, "Just died in this place." The eight Archons of the Sacred Cities... they were figures of legend. The first time Ning had visited a Sacred City, he had felt a sense of awe, admiration, and veneration. And yet, one of the awe-inspiring Archons had died, just like that. True, he had technically committed suicide, but in reality he had been forced to do it.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Ning waved his palm gently. It looked like a casual strike, but it actually encompassed the power of his Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker. The power of the strike was like a wave of water that swept across the entire corpse. With no treasures protecting it, it was easily crushed into dust by the power of Ning's palms.

Ning waved his hand again, collecting all of the treasures which Archon Silksnow had left behind. Ning revealed a smile. He wasn't particularly happy about killing Archon Silksnow, but he was excited and delighted by the fact that he had just acquired a realmship.

"An unexpected benefit. This has now become the most valuable treasure I own." Ning waved his hand, causing the realmship to be pulled into it. After acquiring the realmship, Whitethaw had naturally handed it over to his master immediately.

The realmship was now within Ning's hand, and it was merely the size of a palm. It looked quite shabby and ordinary, and it was covered with marks and scars. In fact, someone who merely looked at it would probably doubt if it could even fly! However, Ning had chased after Archon Silksnow for quite some time, and he knew that it could indeed fly.

"Time to bind it." Ning sent a strand of godsense into the realmship. It

was now ownerless and thus he was able to bind it with ease.

“Master! Master!” The vessel-spirit immediately sought to ingratiate itself with Ning, for fear that Ning would kill it. This was the sad fate which awaited some treasure-spirits and golem-spirits and made them rather pitiable.

“Given the amount of damage this realmship has taken, is it capable of teleporting through spacetime?” Ning asked. The damage really did look quite severe, causing him concern.

“It can!” The vessel-spirit said hurriedly, “It’s completely capable of teleporting through spacetime, but it can’t go too far. It’ll take many blinks to move within a single realmverse, primarily because it has suffered quite some damage. Although the core components are in good shape, many of the other parts have suffered varying amounts of damage. Some parts are completely missing, which is why the ship can only unleash a low level of power.”

Ning nodded. He didn’t feel disappointed. If the realmship had been completely undamaged, Archon Silksnow would’ve escaped long ago. There’s no way Ning would’ve been able to tie him down, resulting in him eventually falling into a trap and being unable to escape.

“Master, I can sense you have a component on you which I desperately need,” the vessel-spirit said quickly.

“Oh?” Ning laughed and waved his hand, causing a part which was more than sixty meters long to appear next to him. This part was a strange component made up of multiple layers of metal that had many divine runes carved within it. It was vastly more complicated than any Hegemon-class golem, and as someone who didn’t understand the Dao of Artificing, Ning didn’t understand it at all.

“Wow, this piece is huge!” The vessel-spirit grew excited. “Master, can I swallow it?”

“Go ahead.” Ning nodded.

Whoosh. A wave of invisible power instantly swept across the sixty-

meter component, which rapidly began to shrink until it was just thumb-sized. While it shrank, it flew towards one of the damaged areas of the realmship. The part was pulled into the realmship, followed by the realmship's surface instantly beginning to glow. The surface of the realmship began to spread out, with some of the damage being automatically healed.

“Realmships possess regenerative powers, but there are certain important core materials they need. With this fairly complete part added into me, some of the other formerly-missing components can be used to regenerate and repair some of other parts.” The vessel-spirit was extremely excited. “Master, now that I’ve been able to repair a critical component, many of the minor damages are being healed as well. I can now move nearly a hundred times farther than in the past. Now, I can teleport through more than half a realmverse with just one blink!”

Ning stared at the realmship in his hand. It now looked much better than it had in the past. Although it still was covered with scars and wounds, it didn’t look as ragged as it had.

A single blink to teleport through more than half a realmverse? This was simply shocking.

“How far are you from perfect status?” Ning asked.

“Extremely far.” The vessel-spirit instantly appeared to be rather deflated. “Although I’m at 90% condition, some of the minor parts which I’m missing are having a major impact on me as a whole. That’s why I’m still not able to teleport nearly as great a distance as I would if I was at 100%.”

Ning couldn’t help but nod in agreement. When he had been a Daolord of the Third Step, he was comparable to supreme Daolords as well as fairly powerful Emperors. Back then, it would take him roughly a million chaos cycles to move via teleportation from one realmverse to another realmverse! Even Hegemons needed to spend extremely long periods of time. Realmships, however, merely needed a few myriads of years.

A few tens of thousands of years... to travel a distance which Ning

normally needed to spend a million chaos cycles to traverse? Its teleporting powers were unfathomably superior to Hegemon Brightshore's.

"However, Master... I can sense that not too far away from me is another important component which I need desperately. If I can absorb it, I should be able to repair a great deal," the vessel-spirit said immediately.

"That's a part which my friend has." Ning nodded, then waved his hand and put the realmship away for now.

Whoosh. Ning bound and scanned all of the treasures which Archon Silksnow had left behind. Although there were a few valuable things, none of them were of much interest to the current Ning.

Despite that, Ning still felt quite excited. A single realmship was more than enough! "This realmship has to be far more valuable than even Crimsonwave Temple. It's enough to ask an Autarch to help out." Ning was extremely excited. "Autarchs possess incredible power and can create even alternate universes with ease. They are more than capable of reversing spacetime to rescue Yu Wei."

"With this realmship, I can bring her back to life. Hahaha... finally, finally, finally! I've finally done it!" Ning stood there within the twisting flaming passageway, so excited that his blood was boiling. The excitement he felt was simply indescribable.

Trading away the realmship to revive Yu Wei... Ning wouldn't even hesitate to make this choice!

Although a realmship would allow him to travel from one realmverse to another with ease, doing so by himself would be far too boring. This was something which Emperors who had lost all their loved ones and who were curious about the outside world would choose! Ning had been training for a much shorter period of time. There were many, many places just within the Flamedragon Realmverse which he had never visited. And, as a Daolord, his lifespan was limited to just 108,000 chaos cycles. There was simply no need for him to wander about other realmverse and enjoy the sites there.

If he could revive her... if he could speak with her once more... that would be the happiest moment of his life. He had no interest in wandering the outside world by himself. The realmship was meaningless to Ning; the only thing it was good for was in trade for asking an Autarch to help him out.

"I'll have to ask Emperor Goldisle and Emperor Blackcloud to help out and invite an Autarch over," Ning mused. The Dao Alliance had certain links to the other realmverses. Through the Dao Alliance, he would be able to send word to an Autarch.

"I'll go visit Ninedust first." Ning suppressed his excitement and led Whitethaw to continue the advance. Thanks to the realmship resonance, Ning knew the rough area Ninedust was in and thus was able to find him fairly quickly.

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Things were quite calm on Ning's side... but a storm was about to erupt within the Endless Territories. All the major powers, reclusive Emperors, and countless Daolords had just received word of something absolutely shocking... one of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities, Archon Silksnow, had perished!

Archon Silksnow had been one of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities, which meant he had a lifeblood tower within the Palace of Immortals of the Dao Alliance. In the exact instant that Ning had forced him to commit suicide, his lifeblood tower had crumbled! This news quickly stunned the entire Palace of Immortals, and word quickly spread out.

There was no need for this news to be suppressed or hidden. All the Emperors found out, as did the countless Daolords.

Archon Silksnow had died? An exalted Archon of the Sacred Cities... it was possible to beat them, but to kill them was far, far too difficult. Even Hegemons found it extremely hard to kill one of them.

Who killed him? How did he die? The entire Endless Territories was in a state of turmoil.

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Ning didn't care about any of this. He continued to advance through the Jadfire Realm, following the realmship resonance. Finally, he passed through the flaming tunnels and reached the prison region, arriving directly at Ninedust's prison.

"Ninedust." Ning immediately saw a silver-robed man seated in the lotus position within a cage of flames. It was the Ninedust Sectlord. Ning couldn't help but to laugh loudly and call out to him.

"Darknorth." When Ninedust opened his eyes and saw Ning, he immediately revealed a look of delight.

Chapter 8: Prison Region

“Just look at yourself,” Ji Ning grinned. “Trapped in a cage and unable to escape.” As he spoke he carefully inspected the flaming cage, hoping to find a way to break it open.

“And just what was I supposed to do? I had nowhere to go and nowhere to run. I had no choice but to hide inside here!” Ninedust laughed helplessly. “I might be trapped, but at least I avoided death. It’s kind of funny, actually... I didn’t die, but Archon Silksnow did! Darknorth, you are simply incredible. You actually forced him into committing suicide!”

Ninedust’s avatar was at Vastheaven Palace. Thus, as soon as Archon Silksnow had died Ninedust’s avatar had asked Ning’s avatar what had happened, resulting in him gaining a general idea of what had happened.

Ning chuckled. “Don’t praise me. It was mainly thanks to my golem over here.”

“To be able to command a golem of such strength is a testament to your power as well. Why don’t I have a golem like that? Archon Silksnow was alive for all those years, but he never acquired a golem like that. Why? Why did you have one instead of him? Because you are strong!” Ninedust said, seated in the lotus position inside the flame cage.

Ning had acquired this golem in a trade from Daoist Bluestone. It was precisely because Ning walked the path of the Omega Sword Dao that Daoist Bluestone had been willing to hand over such an incredibly powerful golem to trade for it. Yes, it was indeed due to Ning’s strength.

Strength was needed to acquire any and all treasures. Even if you were lucky enough to stumble across a treasure of incredible power, if you yourself weren’t strong enough you would quickly lose it to someone stronger than you.

“Everyone in the Endless Territories is talking about how Archon Silksnow is dead. It has been a long, long time since any of the lords of the Sacred Cities have perished,” Ninedust said excitedly. “I rather want to tell everyone in the Endless Territories that you forced him to commit suicide!

Haha..."

"Don't do that. What really matters right now is getting you out of there before something unexpected happens." Ning continued to carefully examine Ninedust's cage.

"Any ideas?" Ninedust was rather eager.

"Don't be so impatient." Ning scrutinized the cage while analyzing it. It looked quite ordinary, and it was easily entered... but there was no way out! Not even Hegemons would be able to escape this cage. The Ninedust Sectlord had charged into it because he didn't know anything about it. Archon Silksnow had been alive for very long and knew that the most dangerous parts of the Jadenfire Realm were its prisons, and so he didn't dare to follow Ninedust inside.

"This cage is part of an extremely large formation," Ning said slowly. "I can sense some of its ripples in the air. Wait a moment, I'm going to go take a look at some of the other parts."

Swoosh. Ning flew off into the distance while following the spatial ripples, with Whitethaw immediately following behind him.

"Be careful. I'm in no rush; I have plenty of time. Don't let yourself get trapped as well!" Ninedust called out loudly. He knew how dangerous the Jadenfire Realm was and was worried about Ning's safety.

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Ning followed the ripples and soon reached another flaming cage in the air. This one was completely empty.

Swoosh. Swoosh. Ning continued to advance while following the ripples. Soon, he encountered yet another cage...

The cages were all formed of flames, and they scattered throughout the area in a disorderly and irregular manner. However, they seemed to be connected to each other by invisible threads.

"Eh?" Ning's eyes narrowed. The flaming midair cage up ahead was devoid of all life, but there were some magic treasures inside of it. There

was a greataxe, a suit of armor, an estate-world, and other treasures. The greataxe was double-bladed, and a lightning-shaped scar was on its edges. It emanated an aura of power that was simply shocking; it had to be a Universe treasure.

“A Universe treasure? Generally, only Emperors can take possession of Universe treasures. Even if the Emperor was trapped here during the Dawn Wars, he should still be able to stay alive...” Ning pondered. “Perhaps some of the cultivators were trapped here during the Dawn Wars were killed by the ‘Decimatus Wave’, but the Sithe didn’t have a chance to collect their treasures.”

Ning’s guess was spot-on. After enough cultivators were trapped within the many flaming cages within the Jedefire Realm, the Sithe would activate a single ‘Decimatus Wave’ to wipe them all out in one go! They would similarly sweep through the cages and collect all the treasures at one go as well.

However, what happened was that when the Jedefire Realm had been attacked and breached, the despairing Sithe had chosen to unleash one final ‘Decimatus Wave’ before dying. The treasures of the dead cultivators were naturally left within the cages.

The one who had breached the Jedefire Realm had been an exalted Autarch! There was no way someone like an Autarch would slowly pick through one prison cell after another to loot the various treasures inside. To Autarchs, such treasures were of minimal interest, and this one in particular was in a hurry to hasten off to another battlefield.

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After spending a full day, Ning finished inspecting the entire prison region. The prison region consisted of many flame cages which were clustered together like the stars in the night sky. The cages were all linked together as part of one massive and incredibly profound formation which was divided into seven primary regions! Each of the seven regions had extremely large cells at their center, with three of them having been completely destroyed. As a result, the prison as a whole was no longer able

to unleash the 'Decimatus Wave'.

"How does it look?" Ninedust immediately asked as Ning flew back to him.

"Some of the cages in the prison area have been damaged, and three of the seven primary cages have been destroyed." Ning looked at Ninedust. "However, the cage you are in is completely undamaged. I don't think even a Hegemon could burst through it with raw power! As for finding its flaws... I haven't been able to find anything yet. This prison formation is simply far too complicated."

Ninedust couldn't help but feel both startled and despondent.

"Ninedust, let me think on this. There'll definitely be a way to bring you out." Ning thought furiously. Even his Primaltwin, seated atop the Autarch's stone dais in the second hall of the Azureflower Estate, was focusing its efforts on finding a solution.

"Darknorth, don't try to force things. This is nothing." Ninedust smiled. He didn't know much about the Jadefire Realm at first, but after his avatar had met with Ning's avatar he had learned quite a bit of detailed information regarding the Jadefire Realm from Ning. Only now did he understand how terrifying the prison region was and how dangerous his situation was.

"As you yourself said, even if Hegemon Brightshore and the others came they wouldn't necessarily be able to breach the prison region. This was a place used to imprison cultivators during the Dawn War!" Ninedust said. "Don't force yourself. I don't mind be trapped here. If push comes to shove, I'll just slowly train here and then initiate my Daomerge within this cell!"

If I succeed, I'll be a Hegemon with an infinite lifespan. I'll have plenty of time to slowly work away at this cell. Sooner or later, I'll succeed," Ninedust consoled Ning.

"The central components of the prison region have been destroyed. This cell might be undamaged, but there's still a chance to break it open." Ning gritted his teeth. He certainly didn't wish for Ninedust to stay here until

the time came for his Daomerge.

Time passed, one day after another. Ning spent a total of nine days in silent meditation, but still was unable to come up with any ideas.

“Master,” Whitethaw suddenly said.

“Hm?” Ning glanced towards him.

“There’s another place in the Jadenfire Realm which might be of use to you in unlocking this cell,” Whitethaw said.

“What place?” Ning was delighted. “Lead the way immediately.”

“Follow me, Master.” Whitethaw immediately led the way.

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The many cells within the prison region were scattered haphazardly, and the seven core cages were arranged in a strange pattern in seven different places. Three of them had been completely destroyed, of course.

Whitethaw led Ning in flying towards the most central region of the prison cells.

“Master.” Whitethaw pointed towards the empty area up ahead. “I was once invited over there along with my Sithe master. We entered a special space over there from where the Sithe controlled the entire Jadenfire Realm.”

“Controlled the entire Jadenfire Realm?” Ning revealed a look of delight. “Right! I should’ve thought of this long ago. Given how vast it is and how many flaming passageways and cells it contains, there has to be a central control mechanism. Whitespace, where is that region?”

“I’m not sure either.” Whitethaw pointed towards the front. “It should be within a three hundred meter radius up ahead. I followed my master inside, and when we entered that region I felt space twist around me. We immediately appeared inside it.”

“Oh?” Ning nodded slowly, then walked through the air towards that region while keenly scanning it.

Whoosh. His body suddenly broke apart into countless pieces as he assumed his Shadowless form, closely attuning himself to the dimensional ripples nearby.

“Ah, there are some flaws after all.” Ning quickly found the traces of the dimensional ripples and their strange cadence. His Shadowless form was able to merge into them and attune to them.

“Arise.” Ning waved a finger, causing a streak of sword-light to tear through that region by force. A dimensional tear appeared before him.

Chapter 9: Sixteen Realmverses Alliance

Ji Ning led Whitethaw into the dimensional tear, going through it and reaching a sealed pocket dimension. This pocket dimension merely covered an area of thirty thousand meters, and it had an enormous black altar within it. Ning and Whitethaw both descended upon the black altar.

“Master,” Whitethaw said. “The Sithe used this place to control the entire Jedefire Realm. Every part of it was under their control.”

“Oh?” Ning swept the area with his gaze. The black altar was quite large, the size of a enormous plaza. Its surface was covered with incomparably complex and marvelous vein lines, all of which came together to form an absolutely enormous flower in full bloom which was surrounded by blazing flames. The pattern of the flames continuously changed at all times, never quite seeming to duplicate a previously used pattern.

“Eh?” Ning was instantly intrigued by it. “That’s the formation-diagram,” Ning murmured softly. “The flames surrounding the outermost layer are being used to represent the pathways that can be taken out of the Jedefire Realm! The pathways are continuously changing and will never repeat... if you aren’t able to find the way out, you’ll be trapped inside forever! This is why it is so easy to enter but so hard to leave.”

“The petals... they represent the countless flaming passageways! They are filled with various traps and mechanisms that can probably be controlled through this formation diagram. As for the stamen... I can vaguely make out seven colors which must represent the countless cells of the seven prisons inside this place.” To try and rescue Ninedust, Ning had spent quite some time examining the prisons of this place in detail. Thus, as soon as he saw the formation-diagram he immediately understand what it represented.

“Master, is this of use to you?” Whitethaw immediately asked.

“Of some use, but this formation-diagram is far too complex. It seems to hold some of the mysteries of the Dao of Fire... but it also involves mysteries of the Dao of the Void. It merges the two together! But that’s

just secondary. What really matters is that it represents an extremely high level of mastery of the Dao of Formations.” Ning shook his head. “The problem is, these are based off unique formations which only the Sithe know. They are completely different from the ones we cultivators use.”

It was extremely strange. Just looking at the formations, Ning could sense a dark, clammy aura sweep towards him and generate an aura of uncontrollable fear. This was a terrifying formation, a formation capable of unleashing a ‘Decimatus Wave’. In truth, even the Sithe had to rely on special techniques to assert control over this formation-diagram, and the controller didn’t understand it all that well.

The problem was, Ning didn’t know those special control techniques. That meant he would have to truly understand it and then unlock it, which would be as hard as anything.

“If I want to save Ninedust, I have to master this formation-diagram,” Ning said softly. Previously, Ning had already completely searched through the cells. He felt that the formations within the prison were simply too complex; there was no way he could make any head or tail of them at all. Everything was shrouded in mist! Now, the formation-diagram controlling everything was before him, and he was able to inspect it in detail... but this only inspired even greater despair. “The prison region...” Ning stared at the ‘stamen’ part of the prison region, increasingly aware of how complex it was.

Ning shook his head, then stared at the flames which flickered at the outermost areas of the giant formation-diagram. These represented the exits from the Jادefire Realm.

“Eh?” Ning’s eyes suddenly lit up. “These... these flames...” A light went off in Ning’s head as he thought back to something he had seen before. In the first palace of the Azureflower Estate, Autarch Awakener had gathered together countless techniques from both the cultivator civilization as well as the Sithe. Ning had memorized all of those techniques, and one of the Sithe techniques which Autarch Awakener had retrofitted had included many different formations. Ning immediately recognized that these flames were a fairly simple variant of the recorded formation!

In truth, the Seven Flaming Hells' formation-diagram was one of the most secret and hidden formation-diagrams of the entire Sithe race. There was no way they would publicize its internal secrets. Not even Autarch Awakener had been able to acquired detailed information about such a thing. However... Autarch Awakener had acquired many other formations from the Sithe, including some that belonged to the same 'school'.

"Ah..." Ning began to grin openly, revealing his pearly white teeth. "Hahaha. A glimmer of hope when all hope seems lost." Ning quickly began to sort through the details of that technique he saw, as did his Primaltwin.

In just the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning was able to completely comprehend and see through the outermost layer of flames which covered the entire vast formation.

"So that's how the exits work." Ning casually waved his finger at one part of the flames. The flames there continued to change and twist about, but now everything was under Ning's control.

"Freeze." Ning's will entered the formation-diagram, and with but a thought the flames that had been twisting and distorting freely began to move and change in accordance with Ning's will.

Rumble... a series of images began to appear in the empty space surrounding Ning. These were illusory projections from the countless flames which represented the outer layer of the entire Jadefire Realm, including its entrances! All of the countless flames in the outmost layer were now under Ning's complete control, including the various exits. The flames rumbled and thundered under Ning's control as he guided them to change formations and locations. Clearly, by thoroughly understanding the outermost layers of flames, it was possible to take control of the outermost formations even if the special control techniques had not been studied.

"Congratulations, Master! Felicitations!" Whitethaw said hurriedly.

"I'm not even close to where I need to be. I've only taken control over the outermost layer." Ning shook his head. "I have to control the entire thing

if I want to be able to rescue Ninedust.”

“This formation-diagram is divided up into three parts. The outermost layer are the flames, the central layer includes the flower petals, and the ‘stamen’ lies at the core.” Ning stared intently at the formation-diagram. “The closer to the core we go, the more difficult it will be. That tiny little flower stamen shall be the most difficult to master of all; once I master that, I’ll have the entire formation-diagram under my control.”

“Now, I’ve defeated the outermost layer of flames. What of the flower petals?” Ning looked at the flower petals, which corresponded to the countless flaming passageways. “This is clearly going to be much more difficult...” Ning frowned.

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Ning began to analyze the Sithe formation techniques he had available. Although his Primaltwin was assisted by the Autarch’s stone dais and was able to train incredibly quickly, the ‘flower petals’ formation was clearly thousands of times more complex and profound than the ‘writhing flames’ formation.’

Time passed on, one day after the other. Ning’s Primaltwin had temporarily brought a halt to its training in the Dao of Water as it focused completely on the Dao of Formations, specifically the branch of it pertaining to the formation-diagram of the Seven Flaming Hells.

“This ‘flower petal’ formation will take me a few hundred thousand years to comprehend.” After spending some time on it, Ning began to understand. Although Autarch Awakener had collected many Sithe formations which could be compared with each other, and although Ning was both talented and had the Autarch’s stone dais which allowed him to be in a constant prajna-like state, it would still take him hundreds of thousands of years to understand this thing.”

“Then what of the ‘flower stamen’ formation which represents the prison region? That’s the real core of the Seven Flaming Hells.” Ning stared at the ‘flower stamen’ at the very center of the enormous, beautiful blooming flower formation before him. Only by mastering that would he

be able to take control over the prisons and rescue Ninedust.

The coiling flames were easy. The flower petal formation was hard. The flower stamen formation was the hardest, so much so that Ning couldn't even estimate how long he would need to master it. One chaos cycle? Ten? Ning still wasn't sure if that would be enough.

"Seven Flaming Hells, eh?" Ning closed his eyes and started to meditate. "One step at a time."

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While Ning focused on training in the Sithe's Dao of Formations, the Endless Territories remained in a state of tumult due to Archon Silksnow's death.

Within a vast everworld. This was a place where countless races lived and thrived, all of them winged. They soared through the skies, the undisputed lords of this everworld.

Whoosh. A figure descended from a dimensional rift. It was a blood-robed elder who emanated the foul odor of blood as he swept the vast everworld before him with his evil gaze.

"Goldisle, my old friend," the blood-robed elder called out, sending a stream of godsense out to encompass this entire world.

"Eh?" A streak of golden light appeared, forming into a bald, gold-furred alien. This was one of the two supreme leaders of the Dao Alliance of the Endless Territories, Emperor Goldisle. Emperor Goldisle had established this everworld for the members of his race to live in, and his avatar was permanently stationed here. Given his power and how his avatar could link into the many formations protecting his home, most likely the only ones in the Endless Territory who would dare to cause trouble here would be the Hegemons.

"Bloodcloud." Emperor Goldisle frowned as he looked at the man.

"Brother Goldisle." Emperor Bloodcloud smiled, which just made him look even fiercer and savager than usual. "I've come because there's something I need to ask you to help me out with, brother Goldisle."

“Need my help?” Emperor Goldisle chuckled. “What, now that Silksnow is dead, you Emperors are leaderless and rudderless. Are you frightened and wish for my protection?” In truth, Emperor Goldisle had no desire to bother with these evil men.

“Afraid? You think I would feel afraid?” Red light shone in Emperor Bloodcloud’s eyes as he growled, “I, Bloodcloud, swear on my very life itself that what I’m going to report is complete true and without falsehood...”

Emperor Goldisle was startled.

“Do you know how Silksnow actually died and why?” Bloodcloud looked at Emperor Goldisle. “I’ll explain in detail...” And so, Emperor Bloodcloud explained the entire sequence of events from start to finish.

“...So the realmship is now in Daolord Darknorth’s hands?!” An astonished look appeared in Emperor Goldisle’s eyes. “I-i-is this for real?” But he immediately fell silent; the man had just sworn a lifeblood oath in front of him! “So that’s the real reason. Silksnow actually had a realmship, and now it has actually fallen into Daolord Darknorth’s possession.” The implications of this were simply far too stunning.

A realmship! Who wouldn’t be intrigued by it, driven mad with lust for it? The combined treasures of all three Hegemons of the Flamedragon Realmverse weren’t even close to the value of a realmship. Archon Silksnow had been unspeakably lucky to acquire it, and he had been extremely low-key, ensuring that no one found out. Now that he was dead, it had fallen into Ji Ning’s hands. In truth, the reason he fell was that he was unable to escape from within all of those barriers and traps. Knowing that his death was certain, he had chosen to tell Emperor Bloodcloud all about it.

“Emperor Goldisle, I wish for you to spread this information to the other realmverses the Dao Alliance is in,” Emperor Bloodcloud is. “Make it public.”

“You—!” Emperor Goldisle’s face tightened.

“All you need to do is to make it public. I trust those Hegemons and major powers will definitely travel towards us at maximum speed, sparing

no expense.” Emperor Bloodcloud smiled, a look of madness in his eyes. “Brother Goldisle, we Emperors are also members of the Dao Alliance. It should be able to help us send this information out, yes?”

“Yes.” Emperor Goldisle nodded. As the leader of the Dao Alliance, he had to follow certain rules which the Dao Alliance had long ago laid out. All Emperors of the Dao Alliance could request for him to send out messages on their behalf.

“I’ll send word of this to all sixteen of the realmverses in our alliance,” Emperor Goldisle said. “However, Darknorth is also a member of the Dao Alliance. I’ll notify him as well.”

Chapter 10: Realmslord Windgrace

Extremely far away from the Flamedragon Realmverse was another realmverse known as the Hiddenfiend Realmverse. Countless cultivators lived here, and the cultivator civilizations flourished every bit as the ones in the Flamedragon Realmverse.

The Hiddenfiend Realmverse had on particularly special star within it known as the Blacksun.

The Blacksun was more than a billion kilometers in diameter and completely black in color. Although it was named 'Blacksun', it was actually a war machine which the Sithe had once paid an unspeakable price in blood and treasure to assemble. It was vastly more valuable than any realmship! When the Sithe had lost the Dawn War, this vast, mighty war machine had fallen into the hands of a major power who was known as Realmslord Windgrace.

Whooosh.

Every so often, a streak of light could be seen flying into our away from the surface of the Blacksun. Space for ten billion kilometers around the Blacksun was under invisible pressure and restrictions, forbidding anyone from using spacetime techniques to teleport through it. Flying was the only option!

Whoosh. A streak of light flew into the Blacksun, landing on the ground and coalescing into the form of a white-robed elder.

The white-robed elder raised his head to look at a distant mountain peak, where a few courtyards could vaguely be seen. He took a single step forwards, his body flickering as he instantly arrived at the base of the mountain. He then called out towards a strange stone statue of an animal, "Second apprentice-brother, please send word! I wish to meet Master!"

"Seventh apprentice-brother, you are back?" The stone statue's eyelids twitched, voice coming out of its lips: "I'm with Master right now. We're drinking together. Uh, Master just said for you to come over as well."

The white-robed elder smiled. Only then did he climb onto the mountain and advance at high speeds towards the top. Courtyards were sprinkled across the peak of this mountain, making it look rather like an ordinary mountain village of mortals. He soon reached the courtyard at the very top, at which point a voice rang out from inside: "Come on inside, Skylight."

"Yes." The white-robed elder pushed the door open and stepped inside. There was a table within this quiet, secluded courtyard, as well as two people next to the table. One was old, the other was young. The old man had tousled hair and a messy beard, and even his eyebrows looked rather unkempt and scruffy. As for the youth, he was a chubby-looking fellow who was shoving meat into his mouth with one hand and pouring wine into his mouth with the other. His face was covered with oil.

"Master. Second apprentice-brother," the white-robed elder called out respectfully. These two unassuming figures, the sloppy old man and the fat kid, were actually the most supreme figures in all the Hiddenfiend Realmverse.

The sloppy old man was a famous and awe-inspiring man who was acknowledged by all the major powers of the Sixteen Realmworlds Alliance as their supreme leader... Realmslord Windgrace, master of the Blacksun!

Realmslord Windgrace was an incredibly powerful Otherverse Lord. During the Dawn War, he had accomplished great deeds during a critical battle, reversing the entire flow of events. He had managed to survive the Dawn War and had won for himself the terrifyingly destructive Sithe war machine known as the Blacksun. Given his power as well as the Sithe treasures he now had, no one dared to take him lightly, and so he was given the paramount position within the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance.

In terms of overall strength, he was also the undisputed number one figure in all sixteen realmverses! Most likely, only Autarchs could truly eclipse him in might.

As for the chubby kid? He was the only disciple under Realmslord

Windgrace who had managed to become a Hegemon as well! His Daoist title was 'Wuye'.

Realmslord Windgrace was an exalted figure with many disciples, but the only one to succeed in becoming a Hegemon had been the unremarkable 'Daolord Wuye', who had spent all of his time studying constructs. Hegemon Wuye... he had no interest in fighting for supremacy, and so he continued to accompany his master here, living a simple and plain life while spending his time analyzing the strange, bizarre Sithe artifacts and constructs that he found. Thankfully, Realmslord Windgrace had many treasures for him to pore over; after they had won the war, Windgrace had acquired quite a few Sithe golems, and he let his disciple obsess over them.

Hegemon Wuye was completely obsessed with golems... but in reality, he had actually become a Hegemon through the Dao of Fire. This was something which truly rendered countless cultivators completely speechless. In fact, he didn't even really do much in preparation for the Daomerge! One day, when he was in secluded meditation while working on some golem parts, he simply succeeded in it.

As Hegemon Wuye had put it, "I suddenly had the feeling that I'd definitely succeed in the Daomerge, so I went ahead and tried it out... and it really worked."

These words caused countless cultivators to feel both jealousy and despair.

"Seventh apprentice-brother, what is it?" Hegemon Wuye asked casually while drinking.

"Why does it have to be something, second apprentice-brother? Can't I just be missing you and master?" the white-robed elder said helplessly.

"You? Pshaw. You only ever come when there's business," Hegemon Wuye snickered.

Realmslord Windgrace chortled, "Come, Skylight. Sit, sit. Sit and we'll talk."

“Yes, Master.” Only then did the white-robed elder sit down and pick up a glass of wine, accompanying his master and his senior brother for a few cups before continuing. “Master, I am indeed here on business. You asked me to watch over the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, yes?”

Both of the other two men looked at him. Both of them were extremely high-level figures who were unwilling to get involved in mundane management affairs, and so they let those with steadier dispositions such as Emperor Skylight to manage many things in their stead.

“Word has spread from the Flamedragon Realmverse that someone known as Daolord Darknorth has managed to acquire a realmship,” the white-robed elder said.

“A realmship?” Both Realmslord Windgrace and Hegemon Wuye were surprised.

“I don’t even have a realmship! How does a Daolord have one?” Hegemon Wuye stared wide-eyed. “Is this for real? Are the three Hegemons and the many ancient Emperors in the Flamedragon Realmverse just going to watch without taking it for themselves?”

“The news is definitely real. It was passed on by an extremely powerful Emperor who swore a lifeblood oath that this information is true,” the white-robed elder said. “Daolord Darknorth isn’t easy to deal with; he may be a Daolord, but he is incredibly strong. Most likely, he stands at the very apex in the Flamedragon Realmverse’s Dao Alliance. Over there, only Daoist Bluestone might stand above him. Supposedly even ‘Archon Silksnow’, one of their ‘eight lords of the Sacred Cities’, was forced by Daolord Darknorth to commit suicide. Even Hegemons would find it very difficult to slay him.”

“He was able to kill one of the lords of the Sacred Cities?” Hegemon Wuye was rather surprised.

“A Daolord?” Realmslord Windgrace murmured, “Can it be an Omega Dao?”

“Omega Dao?”

“What’s an Omega Dao?” The two disciples looked at their master, puzzled.

“I’ve never mentioned this before, because not even I have personally encountered a Daolord who has developed an Omega Dao,” Realmslord Windgrace said. “However, when I was chatting with an Autarch, he once mentioned the ‘Omega Daos’ to me.” Realmslord Windgrace gave a brief explanation of how formidable Omega Daos were, causing both Hegemon Wuye and Emperor Skylight to feel rather stunned.

“For Daolord Darknorth to become second only to Daoist Bluestone in power means that not only has he developed an Omega Dao, he also has other things he is relying upon.” Realmslord Windgrace laughed. “I didn’t imagine that our Sixteen Realmverses Alliance would produce such a genius.”

“Has this information already been spread out?” Realmslord Windgrace asked.

“Master, you already approved of the rules by which the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance were established. Since word was sent from the Flamedragon Realmverse, all fifteen of the other realmverses have found out about it. Even the alternate universe you are in control of is probably aware of this,” the white-robed elder said. “I came to speak to you about this because I wanted to ask if we should intervene as well? That’s a realmship, after all.”

“Wuye, any interest in it?” Realmslord Windgrace asked.

Wuye shook his head. “My focus is on researching golems. What am I going to do with a realmship? And besides... you already have one, Master. If I wanted to use one, I’d just borrow yours, right?”

“You lazy pig.” Realmslord Windgrace laughed. This was what he actually liked the most about this disciple, his obsessive nature. Windgrace had met many major powers in the past, and the ones who managed to amount to anything were often obsessive by nature. The fact that this disciple constantly stayed by his side meant that Windgrace couldn’t help but view his second disciple almost as an actual child. If

Wuye wanted to borrow his realmship, he wouldn't decline.

"Master, what should we do?" the white-robed elder asked.

"There's no need for us to get involved into this. All things in the Chaosverse come and go in a cycle; if he's strong enough to keep it, then it will be his. If he is not, then he has no one to blame but himself," Realmslord Windgrace laughed.

"Master, is it possible that other Hegemons or Emperors will come and ask you to activate the Blacksun to send them over to the Flamedragon Realmverse?" Hegemon Wuye suddenly said.

To travel from one realmverse to another was extremely arduous and time-consuming. The normal method of travel was to slowly teleport through the Great Dark, which would generally take an extremely long period of time.

A better option would be to travel via a realmship, but even faster would be to have an Otherverse Lord blaze a path relying on the otherverse's prime essences. This would be even faster than using a realmship, but it was extremely taxing. Generally speaking, Otherverse Lords would not be willing to do such a thing. Yes, the Otherverse Lords could slow down a bit and use up less energy, but that would mean travelling slower than a realmship.

The fastest option of all was to rely on the power of the Blacksun, which could allow one to instantly teleport from one realmverse to another. Once the Blacksun was activated, it would be able to connect to extremely distant places and, for an exceedingly brief period of time, form a spacetime conduit would allow instantaneous teleportation! However, the energy needed to activate the Blacksun was unspeakably vast. The cost of such a thing was more than enough to beggar or bankrupt an ordinary Hegemon.

The Blacksun had other capabilities as well. Aside from being able to connect two distant realmverses together via a transversal conduit, it could be used to launch terrifying attacks as well. It was truly one of the most deadly Sithe war machines available.

“Over just the chance to win a realmship? There’ll be many competitors, and they won’t necessarily be the victors in the end... I don’t think there are many who are determined enough to ask me to activate the Blacksun,” Realmslord Windgrace said with a laugh. Even he himself rarely activated the Blacksun. It had remained sealed ever since the end of the Dawn War, and it now rarely revealed its true power.

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This information from the Flamedragon Realmverse quickly spread throughout the other fifteen realmverses as well as the otherverse. All of the major powers were stunned to hear that a Daolord could be this powerful... and they were all covetuous of that realmship!

“How strong can a Daolord be, really?”

“I became a Hegemon countless years ago. How could I be unable to kill a Daolord?”

This information quickly drew many Hegemons and a few Emperors out of seclusion. A realmship was simply far too enticing an object... and Daolords were simply viewed as being of no threat at all.

Chapter 11: Heading Off Soon

Vastheaven Territory. Vastheaven Palace.

Emperor Goldisle had come to visit this place once more, and both Ji Ning's avatar and Emperor Solesky had come out to welcome him in person.

"Darknorth," Emperor Goldisle immediately began, "I'm embarrassed to have to tell you about this."

"Brother Goldisle, come inside and sit. We can discuss things slowly." Ning was rather surprised; why was Emperor Goldisle professing to be 'embarrassed' as soon as they met?

Emperor Goldisle nodded, holding back for now. Ning and Solesky led the way for him as the three entered a secluded side-hall within Vastheaven Palace.

The three then sat down, some fine wine placed in front of each of their tables. The aroma of the wine wafted through the entire hall, but Emperor Goldisle was in no mood to relax. He shook his head and sighed, "I'm embarrassed to be telling you this, but... just today, Emperor Bloodcloud went and sought me out."

"Bloodcloud?" Ning frowned. Emperor Bloodcloud was definitely the main pillar of the evil forces left behind by Archon Silksnow! "What, does he want to beg for mercy?" Ning asked.

"That's where you are wrong, Darknorth." Emperor Goldisle shook his head. "He didn't ask for mercy. Instead, he sought to send word through the Dao Alliance to the other realmverses about something he had discovered... and by now, it's probably made its way to all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance."

"Sixteen Realmverses Alliance? What's that?" Ning was puzzled.

"A great alliance that was originally established and led by Realmslord Windgrace. It consists of the Dao Alliances of the sixteen nearest realmverses which have joined together to ensure stability, peace, and

allies in the event of outside invaders. We can notify each other of various dangers or important information we discover. In times of crisis, the sixteen realmverses will be in absolute lockstep and will not fear any outside forces. Realmslord Windgrace was chosen as the paramount leader by all sixteen realmverses, and is acclaimed as the most powerful expert of the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance.”

“Realmslord Windgrace?” Ning sighed in amazement.

“The strongest in sixteen realmverses?” The nearby Emperor Solesky sighed in amazement as well. That meant he had to be far stronger than even Hegemon Brightshore.

“He’s in control of an alternate universe and is incredibly strong. During the Dawn War, he rendered incredible merits in battle and ended up in control of the terrifying Sithe war machine known as the Blacksun...” Emperor Goldisle continued, “But that’s enough about him. I’m here because of what Emperor Bloodcloud instructed our Dao Alliance to send to everyone else. This is something that will be of deep concern to you, Darknorth.”

Ning and Solesky exchanged a glance.

“What did he say?” Ning had a bad feeling already.

“Emperor Blackcloud said that it was you who hunted down Archon Silksnow, forcing him to commit suicide in the end... and that his realmship is now in your hands.” Emperor Goldisle continued, “Emperor Bloodcloud asked me to send this information outwards. As you know, the Dao Alliance is a very loose structure and has just a few basic rules. There were no grounds for me to reject this proposal... and even if he didn’t go through me, he would’ve been able to go through the numerous other Emperors who are connected to the other realmverses.”

“No need to say anything more, brother Goldisle. I understand.” Ning’s face was tight. “Give me a moment to think.”

“Yes, you do need to think this over,” Emperor Goldisle agreed, a heavy look on his face. “Now that word has been sent to all sixteen realmverses as well as the otherverse which is under Realmslord Windgrace... I’m

worried that quite a few Hegemons and powerful Emperors will hasten to our Flamedragon Realmverse and try to take that realmship from you.”

Ning was lost in thought. Nasty. A truly nasty shot. Archon Silksnow was just as hard-hearted towards himself as he was towards his foes. He had never dared to reveal the secrets of the realmship prior to his passing, so why was it that Emperor Bloodcloud had found out immediately after he had died? Why was it that Emperor Bloodcloud also knew that Archon Silksnow had been hunted down by Ning and forced to commit suicide?

Who would know all these little details? Aside from Ning himself, only the deceased Archon Silksnow knew.

“Nasty move, Silksnow... so this is the final card up your sleeve to kill me?” Ning slowly shook his head. “You risked your life to delve into the Jadenfire Realm, all for the purpose of trying to draw me inside and kill me... and you even came up with a final backup plan to use the realmship to kill me if you yourself could not.”

Emperor Solesky and Emperor Goldisle both looked at Ning, waiting for him to make a decision.

“Darknorth, why don’t you give the realmship up?” Emperor Solesky couldn’t help but suggest.

“Give it up?” Ning shook his head. “If I trade the realmship to others, I’ll still be in possession of a vast amount of treasure. That treasure will continue to attract greedy eyes from some other major powers...”

“Then don’t ask for any treasures at all. Just hand it over as a gift,” Emperor Solesky said.

“And why do I have to give away my treasures?” Ning shook his head, a cold smile on his lips and a chilling gleam in his eyes. He then looked at Emperor Goldisle. “Brother Goldisle, there’s something I’ll have to trouble you with.”

“Just go ahead and say the word.” Emperor Goldisle felt a bit embarrassed himself, but there had been nothing he could do; the Dao Alliance’s rules were binding! In addition, quite a few Emperors were

connected to the outside world. Many of them spent their days wandering and adventuring but kept their avatars back home! Thus, it was extremely simple to ask these Emperors to help spread the word.

There was no way to stop it at all, and so Emperor Goldisle wasn't willing to disobey the laws of the Dao Alliance.

"As you know, I've always wished to reverse spacetime to revive my Dao-companion." Ning smiled. "Now that I have this realmship, I wish to use it to ask an Autarch to do just that."

"Ask an Autarch?" Emperor Goldisle and Emperor Solesky were both stunned. They had both heard of Autarchs, but not even the majority of Hegemons were ever able to actually meet one.

"Fine." Emperor Goldisle nodded repeatedly. "That's a good solution. If your treasures ends up in the hands of an Autarch, nobody would be able to do anything about it! But Darknorth, I have to warn you... the Dao Alliance can only help you send the word to the Autarch as soon as possible. As for how long the Autarch will take, we can't be sure. To Autarchs, realmships might be nice little toys, but they still won't care enough to drop everything for one. They'd only accept your offer to ensure that the most basic laws of fairness in the universe are maintained."

"I understand." Ning nodded. Autarchs were at the apex of power amongst cultivators, capable of creating even otherverses with ease. When the Sithe had been defeated, the Autarchs must've acquired countless spoils of war. Even if that wasn't the case, at their level these treasures really held almost no meaning for them at all.

They weren't truly completely uncaring towards the weaker cultivators... but they couldn't just help everyone who asked willy-nilly either! That wouldn't be appropriate. Thus, Autarchs operated off a simple principle... if you wanted one of them to help you out, you had to pay a corresponding price, even though they themselves didn't care about treasure per se.

"Right. I'll go send the word now," Emperor Goldisle said. "I'll get you a response as soon as I can."

"Good." Ning felt excitement swell in his breast. He was asking a favor

of an Autarch! A favor for a realmship... when would the Autarch come?

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Word quickly spread to Realmslord Windgrace's territory. He possessed a pre-eminent status; he was the only one in all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance who was capable of contacting an Autarch.

"He wishes to use a realmship to ask an Autarch to revive his Dao-companion? This Daolord Darknorth is quite the romantic." Realmslord Windgrace laughed when he heard this, then immediately helped send the word.

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A distant region of great darkness. Within the emptiness of the void, there was an enormous triangular region with a series of dazzlingly beautiful palaces in the very center, each of which emanated specks of golden light.

At the very center was a particularly towering palace, the greatest of them all.

"Master." An azure-robed youth who emanated the aura of eternity moved to stand respectfully outside a private room within the palace.

Inside the private room was a bald, black-robed old man who had a pair of fleshy antennae growing from the top of his head. His golden eyes were focused intently on the skull-sized round gray globe in front of him, and the countless runes and patterns the globe was covered with.

The fleshy antennae waved about above the bald old man's head, but his eyes were filled with excitement. He gently reached out to tap the gray globe once, causing the countless patterns to instantly change and an aura of power to build.

"Still not right." The bald old man shook his head, then reached out with his ashen white right hand to give it another tap, bringing it back into quiescence.

"Master." A second call rang out from outside.

“Xian’er. Why are you bothering me?” Only now did the old man notice the distraction and respond.

“Realmslord Windgrace sent word that someone named Daolord Darknorth in the Flamedragon Realmverse wishes to use a realmship to ask you to help him reverse spacetime to revive his Dao-companion,” the azure-robed youth outside said respectfully.

“Another lovesick man.” The bald old man nodded. “Alright, fine. Got it. Stop bothering me, I’ll head over there soon!”

“Soon?” The youth outside the door murmured softly, “Master, the last time you said you would go ‘soon’, you delayed by over 600,000 chaos cycles...”

The bald old man’s antennae instantly begin to twist in embarrassment and irritation. “How dare you mock me, you brat! This time, it really will be soon! I’ve pretty much finished repairing this treasure. It needs just a tiny bit more work. Once I’ve finished repairing it, I’ll head over! Alright, don’t bother me again before I finish this project.’

“Alright.” The azure-robed youth had no choice but to leave, then send this response back to his good friend ‘Realmslord Windgrace’.

Chapter 12: Escorted

After helping Ji Ning send word, Emperor Goldisle didn't immediately hurry to depart. He instead continued to remain at Vastheaven Palace as he wanted for the Autarch's response. Just half a day later, that response came.

"Darknorth." Emperor Goldisle immediately sought Ning out. Ning was seated silently at the peak of a mountain. When he saw Emperor Goldisle fly towards him, he couldn't help but feel nervous: "Do we have an answer?"

Whoosh. Emperor Goldisle alighted on the mountain top next to him. "We have an answer. Ever since the war against the Sithe concluded, it became hard to locate the Autarchs and virtually no Hegemons know where they are! We had to rely on Realmlord Windgrace and his extraordinary status to accomplish it. He rendered major accomplishments during the Dawn War and is the only person in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance who can contact the Autarchs... but this time, he was only able to reach out to Autarch Titanos!"

"Autarch Titanos?" Ning grew eager with anticipation. All Autarchs were transcendental figures. After the war, Autarch Bolin had created the Aeonian race and then disappeared. Autarch Awakener was an even more mysterious figure; he had wandered the entire Chaosverse then disappeared without a trace as well. It was only thanks to Ning's encounter with the Azureflower Estate that he knew Autarch Awakener had perished in a way which 'could be considered suicide'.

To contact an Autarch was no easy feat!

"The other Autarchs roam about too much. Only Autarch Titanos stays in his estate at most times. Supposedly, Autarch Titanos spends all of his time analyzing the Sithe civilization and is thus the easiest Autarch to reach. When we need an Autarch to do something, he's apparently the one we usually manage to contact," Emperor Goldisle explained.

"Did the Autarch accept?" Ning asked.

“Autarch Titanos did accept, yes. He said he’d come ‘soon’.” A resigned look was on Emperor Goldisle’s face.

“Soon?!” Ning was overwhelmed with joy.

“Don’t get too excited. Last time he said the same thing, but he delayed for over 600,000 chaos cycles,” Emperor Goldisle said. “You understand, I’m sure. We’re lucky the Autarch agreed to help out at all; there’s no way to demand them to come here immediately.”

Ning stared. “Did you just say 600,000!?” He would probably be long dead by then! Daolords only had lifespans of 108,000 chaos cycles.

“Realmslord Windgrace asked Emperor Yuxian to nag him a bit...” Emperor Goldisle shook his head. “Autarch Titanos promised that this time, he really would come ‘very soon’. He’s extremely close to finishing some repair work on a Sithe treasure.”

Ning was helpless. “How soon is ‘very soon’? Alright, I understand. I have no choice but to wait.”

“Realmslord Windgrace said that he’ll do his best to try and contact a different Autarch as well! But for now, he hasn’t been able to find any,” Emperor Goldisle said.

“Help me relay my thanks to Realmslord Windgrace,” Ning said. And in his heart, he truly did feel grateful. No relationship existed between him and the Realmslord, the most paramount expert of the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. The man needed nothing from him; for him to work so hard on Ning’s behalf was already a show of great goodwill.

Ning felt a mixture of nervousness, excitement, and disappointment. It was quite rare for Ning to feel such an emotional potpourri, but this was simply too important to him. Reviving his wife was the greatest desire he had.

“Autarch Titanos knows you are a Daolord. He probably won’t delay for too long,” Emperor Goldisle said consolingly.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. He had already done everything he could. Hopefully, Autarch Titanos really would arrive ‘soon’.

“Next, I need to worry about how I am going to deal with the Hegemons and major powers who come from the other realmverses.” There was no way Ning was going to hand his realmship over to these outsiders.

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Hiddenfiend Realmverse. The Blacksun.

Three figures were standing atop a deserted plains. One was the chubby youth, ‘Emperor Wuye’, while the other two were also major powers.

“Wuye, you are being too greedy. It’s just a trip to the Flamedragon Realmverse. Why are you asking for that much?” One of the two was a skinny old man whose skin was covered with a layer of azure scales. He spoke in an unhappy voice as he looked at his comrade, a tall, muscular man who had two black wings on his back.

“I not only have to send you there, I have to bring you back as well!” Hegemon Wuye stared at him. “That’s a round trip!”

“But why do you have to insist on Hegemons costing three times as much as other Emperors?” the skinny old man continued to mutter unhappily.

“How can I treat them equally? All of you are going to the Flamedragon Realmverse to fight over the realmship, right? Hegemons naturally stand a much better chance than all the other Emperors.” Hegemon Wuye grinned. “Azurefiend, cut the crap already. You should be counting your lucky stars! You don’t even belong to the Hiddenfiend Realmverse, you were just passing through. That’s the only reason you even have a chance to get involved in this opportunity... and you are even so lucky as to be in the first batch of people I’m delivering. That means you’ll be amongst the first to get there.”

Whoosh. Whoosh. Two streaks of light flew towards them from afar. “Hurry up!” Hegemon Wuye called out to the two. “We’re waiting on you two!”

“Wuye, I can’t believe how much you are charging, given how long we have been friends for.” One of the two figures flying over was a three-eyed,

golden-robed old man who shook his head as he spoke.

“Either pay the price or figure out a way to go on your own,” Hegemon Wuye muttered. “It’s pretty rare for me to have a chance to make some money with this realmship, so cut the moaning.” Hegemon Wuye often took advantage of his master and used his master’s golems to make money, but this time he wanted to earn a few more treasures than usual. This was why he had borrowed the realmship from his master, offering to send people forward but demanding a high price for it. He charged Hegemons one price and all other Emperors a different price.

“Dawnruler, the fact that we both belong to the Hiddenfiend Realmverse means that you are going to be the first group of people to arrive at the Flamedragon Realmverse. Just celebrate your good fortune quietly! Alright, now that everyone is here we’re going to head off!”

Hegemon Wuye waved his hand, leading Hegemon Azurefiend, Hegemon Dawnruler, and the other two Emperors into his realmship. He then left the Hiddenfiend Realmverse and began to advance through the endless Great Dark.

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The only people belonging to the Hiddenfiend Realmverse who wanted to take part in this expedition were Hegemon Dawnruler and the two Emperors! As for Hegemon Azurefiend, he was a wandering Hegemon who wasn’t native to this place.

Hegemon Wuye’s responsibility was simply to serve as a ferry. He had three batches of people he was going to deliver in total. Some realmverses were nearby while others were far away, after all. For the first batch, he would take a few detours on the way to the Flamedragon Realmverse, moving through two other nearby realmverses and picking up a few more people. Thus, he would bring a total of three realmverses worth of major powers to the Flamedragon Realmverse.

For the second batch, he would leave the Flamedragon Realmverse and make a roundabout trip, bringing the major powers of three more realmverses to the Flamedragon Realmverse.

For the third batch, he would only be able to bring the major powers from two of the most distant realmverses over.

This made for a total of eight realmverses! The reason why he was only responsible for eight was because someone was competing for the same business. In the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, there was someone else known as Hegemon Fogsun who also had a realmship and was doing the same thing he was. Based on their respective locations, they had ended up carving out the sixteen realmverses in half, with one side responsible for eight while the other was responsible for seven.

Hegemons were charged one price while other Emperors were charged a different price. The people in the first batch would be charged a higher price, while those who went later would be a bit of a discount. However, the difference wouldn't be that great. They all knew that given how Daolord Darknorth had been able to force an Archon to his death, it would be no easy task for them to force him to give up a realmship.

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The Terror Starsea. The Jadefire Realm. Within that hidden dimensional control center.

Ning remained seated in the lotus position in the air above the altar, staring down at the formation-diagrams below.

"Eh? Hegemon Wuye and Hegemon Fogsun are each in control of a realmship and are responsible for ferrying the people over?" Ning nodded slowly. "I wonder which Hegemons and major powers will end up getting involved."

Some information remained highly confidential. Clearly, these major powers wished to keep as much secret as they could, so as to catch him off-guard.

"Fifteen realmverses and an otherverse..." Ning calculated silently to himself, "How many major powers will take part, all combined?" By now, he had learned quite a bit from Emperor Goldisle.

Rumors said that even foreign Hegemons were taking part, and more

than one at that. Other rumors whispered that no one within the otherverse was going to take part. Still other rumors said that as many as three Hegemons and four Emperors from the Windnest Realmverse were coming for him. It must be understood that the Windnest Realmverse only had a total of four Hegemons; that meant that the majority of its elite experts were all coming...

All sorts of rumors were flying around, some real and some false. This caused Ning to feel a tremendous sense of pressure.

“I need to master the ‘flower petal formation’ as soon as possible. By then, I’ll be able to control the countless flaming passageways and use them against my foes.” Ning stared downwards, his Immortal energy pouring into the formation-diagram and causing the flower petals on the giant formation below to light up, revealing projections of the countless flaming passageways in the air around him.

Every single flaming passageway projection seemed extremely real, and they were all covered with countless traps and mechanisms.

“I have to figure out how to defeat the control mechanisms if I want to take control over the traps.” Ning shook his head. He had just barely been able to make some progress in the past few days, which was why he was able to cause the entire region to appear in the air around him. However, he was unable to actually control any of it.

Chapter 13: Control

Time flowed on, one day at a time. Ji Ning's Primaltwin remained at the Azureflower Estate, relying on the Autarch's stone dais to furiously meditate on the various techniques that belonged to the same school as the 'Seven Flaming Hells Formation'.

Ten years. A hundred years. A thousand years...

In the blink of an eye, over nine thousand years had gone by.

"Haha..." The white-robed Ning seated in the lotus position in the air above the giant Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram began to laugh loudly as he rose to his feet, a look of delight on his face. Immortal energy surged from his entire body, flooding into the formation-diagram and flowing towards the flower petals.

Boom. Boom. Boom. The projections of the countless flaming passageways once more appeared in the air around him. Each passageway was as thin as a strand of silk, and each strand-like passageway was filled with countless mechanisms and traps. In truth, Ning could see them all clearly with the naked eye, and he was now able to control every single one of them as well.

"After meditating for over 900,000 thousand years, I've finally managed to comprehend the flower petal formation." Ning revealed a look of delight. Although only nine thousand years had gone by in the 'real' world, his Primaltwin had spent this entire period of time under 100x temporal acceleration.

Clack clack clack clack...

Boom boom boom boom...

The Jadefire Realm was absolutely enormous, and the flaming passageways made up the largest part of it. Every single flaming passageway was incredibly long, and the countless flaming passageways formed an enormous nest which led to the prisons at the very heart!

By now, all of the countless flaming passageways were trembling. Some

of the previously-revealed mechanisms suddenly went into hiding once more, while damaged traps began to automatically repair themselves, with quite a few returning to perfect condition. However, there were many other areas which had been forcibly torn apart; even though Ning was able to perfectly control those areas, he wasn't able to repair them.

“Roughly 30% of the area has been wrecked.” Ning nodded slowly as he swept his glance across the countless illusory passageways in midair. “The Jadefire Realm was damaged so heavily during the war that it is now a flawed creation. However... in the remaining 70%, the countless mechanisms and traps are all under my control. It's now far more dangerous than it was previously.” Ning's eyes flashed with the desire to do battle.

Previously, he was dreading the major powers who were attacking the Flamedragon Realmverse. Now, he was merely somber and careful. He was confident in his chances to deal with them, in his chances to fight back!

Previously, many of the mechanisms and traps within the countless flaming passageways were exposed due to there being no one in control; this made it extremely easy for them to move past the mechanisms. Now that they had a master again, things were different. Even if you didn't activate a trap, Ning could cause it to activate with a thought to envelop you! There were some extremely powerful mechanisms that, when unleashed, would release blasts that would cover over ten billion kilometers. There would be no way to dodge them at all.

“Hmph.” Ning mused to himself, “Many Hegemons have come against me... but I, Darknorth, won't necessarily lose.”

Although Ning was more confident in his chances now that he was in control of the tunnel passageways, he still didn't dare to be overconfident. He knew just how powerful his foes were, and they all knew how dangerous the Jadefire Realm was. There was no way they would be easily trapped.

“The only thing left is the ‘flower stamen formation’ at the core.” Ning began to work on analyzing the most difficult-to-understand part of the

formation, the one governing the prison regions.

Controlling the 'flower stamen formation' meant controlling all of the prisons within the area, allowing him to save Ninedust. Alas, many of the prisons had been destroyed. If they were all perfectly undamaged, control over them would give him ability to unleash a Decimatus Wave.

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Time flowed on. More than 80,000 years had gone by in the blink of an eye. A rip in spacetime suddenly appeared in a region of empty primordial chaos within the Flamedragon Realmverse, followed by an invisible bubble of power pushing out of it with an ancient ship.

"Haha, everyone, we've reached the Flamedragon Realmverse." A loud laugh could be heard, followed by the flying vessel disappearing into thin air and a group of figures appearing in its place.

There were a total of ten figures in total. One was Hegemon Wuye, the others were all various major powers he had picked up. "I've already brought you all to the Flamedragon Realmverse." Hegemon Wuye looked at the nine. "You can decide for yourselves if you wish to wait here for the next batch of Emperors or if you wish to go off and hunt down Daolord Darknorth on your own. In short, once this is all concluded I'll be back to bring you back to your respective realmverses. Alright, I'm off! I have to go get the next two batches of Emperors."

"Thank you, brother Wuye."

"Brother Wuye, just take your time with the others. The more you delay, the better." The nine major powers were all in a good mood. Judging from time and distance, they should've been the first to arrive.

Hegemon Wuye took control over his realmship and departed.

"Let's go. Let's head to the Terror Starsea and the Jadefire Realm," the skinny azure-scaled old man, 'Hegemon Azurefiend', said in a low voice. Of the nine Emperors present, five were Hegemons while the other four were quite powerful in their own right. Only those who were extremely confident in their abilities would dare to come here, with Hegemon

Azurefiend being the strongest of the group.

“Let’s go.”

“We aren’t too far away from the Terror Starsea.”

“I travel the fastest. I’ll lead everyone with me,” an man dressed in graceful azure robes said with a smile. His fingers were as smooth as alabaster jade, and as he waved his finger he easily tore a path through spacetime.

“Since Hegemon Oldgem has chosen to guide us, let’s just go ahead and accept his kind offer.” The other major powers didn’t reject.

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Although he wasn’t quite familiar with the Terror Starsea, Hegemon Oldgem truly was a formidable figure when it came to travelling. It took him merely a century or so to arrive outside the Jadefire Realm.

“The Jadefire Realm. How beautiful.” Hegemon Oldgem stared at the enormous vortex of flames before them, each of the flames looking like the petal of a flower. “Supposedly, this was a nightmare for our people during the Dawn War. Many major powers were imprisoned in here, and all those who went inside perished.”

“Everyone, we’ve already collected quite a bit of information regarding the Jadefire Realm. Based on what we know, entering is easy but leaving is difficult.” Hegemon Dawnruler said in a cold voice, “Daolord Darknorth went in a fairly short while ago. I imagine he probably hasn’t been able to flee just yet. Shall we wait for him outside or shall we go inside?”

“Go inside of course,” Hegemon Azurefiend said, a glimmer of terrifying red light flashing in his eyes. “We were the first to arrive here. If we waste any time, Hegemon Fogsun’s realmship will probably arrive with another batch of Emperors. By then, we’ll have lost our first-mover advantage and it’ll be even harder to acquire the realmship. The more time we waste, the more Emperors will arrive and the more difficult things will become.”

“Right.” A bald, grim-looking red-robed man nodded slowly.

“I agree that we should all go in together right away as well,” a silver-haired elder with a stone sword on his back agreed.

Since the five Hegemons were all in occurrence, the other four Emperors simply exchanged glances but said nothing.

“Haha... what a pity! I hear that the most powerful figure in the Flamedragon Realmverse is Hegemon Brightshore. He should know quite a bit about this Jadefire Realm, but he wasn’t willing to tell us anything about it at all.” Hegemon Azurefiend chortled. “Still... we were able to accumulate quite a good amount of intelligence. It should be enough. The Jadefire Realm was shattered long ago and should no longer pose of much a danger to us. Come, come! Let’s go inside.”

Hegemon Azurefiend immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew inside.

“Let’s go,” Hegemon Oldgem said.

“All together now.”

“Let’s go.” The nine Emperors began to charge into the vast vortex of flames, either singly or in pairs. Soon, all of them had entered the Jadefire Realm.

“There are this many flaming passageways?” After entering the Jadefire Realm, the Emperors saw the countless flaming tunnels off in the distance.

“Which one should we choose?”

“We? Gentlemen, are we still planning to travel together? Haha, I’m more accustomed to moving by myself. I’ll go in first. If I’m the first one to find Daolord Darknorth, the realmship will be mine,” Hegemon Azurefiend laughed wickedly. He immediately charged into one of the flaming passageways next to him. He was the most powerful member of this group of Emperors and thus naturally wasn’t interested in working together with the others.

He refused to believe that he wasn’t able to kill a mere Daolord!

“Let’s go.” Hegemon Dawnruler scanned the area with his three eyes, then took a single step forwards and transformed into golden light that burrowed in a distant flaming passageway.

“Let it all be up to fate.” The bald, grim-faced man dressed in red robes revealed a hint of a smile as he flew into one of the flaming passageways as well.

“Brother Oldgem, let’s travel together?” the silver-haired elder with the ancient stone sword on his back asked.

“Let’s.” Hegemon Oldgem smiled. These two Hegemons flew towards one of the flaming passageways together. These two came from the same realmverse and were on extremely good terms with each other; if they acquired the realmship, they would share it. It wouldn’t really matter who owned it.

“The five Hegemons have all gone inside. We should go as well.” The four remaining Emperors exchanged glances. Soon, they formed into two squads of two which flew into the flaming passageways as well.

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The hidden control region within the Jadefire Realm. Ning remained seated in midair above the altar, scanning the surrounding area with his gaze. The area around him manifested projections of the flaming passageways of the Jadefire Realm, as well as the nine figures making their way through those passageways. These nine figures had entered the Jadefire Realm together, then had separately entered different passageways. Ning had watched all of this carefully.

“Have they come?” Ning murmured softly, “This first batch is already putting me under quite a bit of pressure.”

Chapter 14: Bait

Since Ji Ning knew that a host of major powers was coming from the various realmverses for him, he had naturally acquired quite a bit of material and information on his foes. Hegemon Brightshore and Emperor Goldisle had been particularly helpful, introducing detailed information regarding the most famous Hegemons and extremely powerful Emperors of the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance to Ning.

Thus, when Ning ‘saw’ those nine figures appear through the formation-diagram, he was able to recognize them at one go.

“Five of these nine are Hegemons. Hegemon Oldgem and the Paragon of Swords are actually working together? They are all being extremely cautious.” Ning shook his head slowly. “Hegemon Dawnruler... Hegemon Everworry... hey, this should be Hegemon Azurefiend.”

Ning’s gaze focused upon the figure of the latter. Hegemon Azurefiend was flying carefully through the flaming passageways, his eyes glowing with cold light as he carefully scanned the area in front of him. Hegemon Azurefiend was even using a pair of rope-type magic treasures to scout the path ahead for himself.

“Supposedly, Hegemon Azurefiend is one of the several foreign Hegemons taking part in this escapade.” Ning carefully scrutinized Hegemon Azurefiend. Based on what he knew, there were differences in power between Hegemons; Hegemon Brightshore, for example, was the number one Hegemon of the Flamedragon Realmverse! Even in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, Hegemon Brightshore was powerful enough to rank in the top five.

But of course, there was no way to rank anyone in greater detail than that, as most of the Hegemons had never actually battled each other. Rough rankings could only be based on the performance they had shown in the past, which was why Realmlord Windgrace was acknowledged to be the absolute strongest. Next came the likes of Hegemon Brightshore.

Hegemon Windrain and Hegemon Netherlily were considered fairly

‘ordinary’ Hegemons in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance.

“Hegemon Azurefiend is extremely famous! Supposedly, he was born a Chaos Godbeast and has a strange temperament. He’s extremely powerful and ranks highly even amongst Hegemons,” Ning mused. “Based on what the intelligence reports tell me, he should be even stronger than Hegemon Netherlily and Hegemon Windrain. He should be the strongest of the five Hegemons in this batch.”

In the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, there were only a few figures capable of suppressing Hegemon Azurefiend in power! “Hegemon Azurefiend, eh?” Several thoughts flickered through Ning’s mind.

“I’ll feign weakness first. These five Hegemons only constitute a small percentage of the Hegemons who will be coming, after all. The only trump card I have up my sleeve is my control over the flaming passageways; once I reveal it, the Hegemons and Emperors who arrive later will only be even more careful. They might even all travel together. That’ll make things very troublesome for me,” Ning mused.

Only by feigning weakness could he lull his foes into underestimating him. Only then would his foes move independently on their own, as only when they felt that Ning was not a threat would they be truly concerned about competing against the other Hegemons. This would be of benefit to Ning.

“My control over the flaming passageways is a killer trump card. I have to save it for a moment of maximum effect. That’s my only shot at reversing the situation.” Ning’s gaze was focused on the nine illusory figures advancing through the countless passageways. Every single action they took was within his field of vision.

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“This Jadefire Realm really is in terrible shape. A few mechanisms have appeared, but I was able to discover them all from afar.” Hegemon Azurefiend continued to fly forwards, two billion-kilometer sized ropes scouting the way up ahead for him.

“According to the legends, the Jadefire Realm was absolutely terrifying

when intact. It's very weak now. No wonder so many Emperors of the Flamedragon Realmverse were able to come in, scout the place, and then leave safely." Hegemon Azurefiend shook his head and chuckled. He felt increasingly relaxed; things were much simpler than he had anticipated.

This place might be of danger to weaker Emperors, but he was an exalted Hegemon. How much of a danger could these damaged, unmanned traps and mechanisms possibly pose him?

"Daolord Darknorth, eh? You'll definitely be mine. Heh heh... I'll kill him and then take his realmship, allowing me to easily rove across the various realmverses. It won't be as difficult as it is now." Hegemon Azurefiend felt quite eager. He was a temperamental character, but was born liking to wander about by himself and adventure through the void.

Swoosh. Hegemon Azurefiend continued to advance at high speeds through the flaming passageways, using the many tools he had available to scout out the path ahead and avoid them with ease.

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"This is easier than expected." The bald, red-robed, grim-faced man strolled through the skies, his body emanating with gray light that illuminated the area ahead of him and laid bare all of the hidden dangers.

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Each of the major powers felt as though the Jadefire Realm wasn't as dangerous as they had thought. So long as they were careful, they would be able to advance with ease.

Time passed, one day after the other.

"Soon. Hegemon Azurefiend is the fastest; he's about to go through the flaming passageway area and reach the prison region. It is time for me to make my own move as well. I can't let them get into and explore the prison region." Ning was still seated in the lotus position above the altar, but a streak of light suddenly flew out of his body, manifesting into a second 'Ji Ning' in the air. This was a divine power clone.

"Whitethaw, let's go," Ning barked.

“Alright,” Whitethaw said respectfully. Whoosh. Ning waved his hand, causing the ancient realmship to appear next to him. It was now in much better shape than it had been when Archon Silksnow had owned it. Ning and Whitethaw both entered the realmship, then quietly snuck away from the hidden region, leaving behind just the divine power clone inside.

Rumble... Ning’s divine power clone remained seated above the altar and the formation-diagram, using its Immortal energy to manipulate the formation-diagram and maintain control over things from afar.

Controlling the formation-diagram took very little power. Although this divine power clone was fairly weak, for it to use Immortal energy to control the formation-diagram was simplicity itself.

With his clone present, Ning would be constantly aware of the locations and behaviors of the nine Hegemons and Emperors.

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Within the darkness of the void. An ancient realmship was hovering in the skies next to a flaming cage, with Ning’s true body and Whitethaw inside the realmship.

Whoosh. Ten billion kilometers up ahead, an azure-scaled figure suddenly flew out from one of the flaming passageways. This figure emanated an extremely strange aura; it didn’t seem that dominating or overbearing, but based on Ning’s intelligence reports it definitely belonged to a terrifying figure who was ranked highly even amongst other Hegemons.

“Hegemon Azurefiend!” Ning grinned. “Let’s move.” Swoosh! Ning controlled his realmship to immediately fly into a nearby flaming passageway.

“Eh?” Hegemon Azurefiend had just reached the prison region after leaving the flaming passageways when he suddenly sensed a ripple from afar. Turning his head, he immediately saw that realmship.

“The realmship!” Hegemon Azurefiend was instantly overjoyed, so excited that his eyes lit up. “Haha, I really am lucky. I actually ran into the

realmship as soon as I arrived here, and it seems as though the other Hegemons haven't discovered it yet."

"You want to run? Heh heh..." Hegemon Azurefiend's speed skyrocketed as he furiously chased after the fleeing realmship.

Ning sent the realmship fleeing into the flaming passageways, beginning a 'panicked' flight through the area. Hegemon Azurefiend naturally followed him into the flaming passageways as well from behind.

"You won't be able to escape. You aren't going anywhere!" Hegemon Azurefiend spoke out, his voice carrying a strange, magnetic cadence that caused the area around Ning to shimmer.

"Azurefiend, don't try to show off such meager skill in illusions before me. Hmph." Ning's voice echoed within the flaming passageways as well.

"Hand the realmship over to me and I'll spare your life. Otherwise, you are doomed!" Hegemon Azurefiend chased frantically from behind.

"You think you can doom me? Hmph. I'll show you just how incredible a realmship truly is." Even as Ning's voice echoed within the flaming passageways, the realmship suddenly skyrocketed in speed. Swoosh! It instantly pulled away from Hegemon Azurefiend, throwing him off and making it so that he could do nothing but watch as Ning disappeared from his field of vision.

"T-that fast?!" Hegemon Azurefiend was briefly stunned, but his eyes then flashed with savage light. "Good. What a fine realmship." Realmships were meant for travel. When Archon Silksnow had used it, it was in terrible shape but still far faster than Ning. Now, it had been repaired considerably and was even faster than before, allowing Ning to easily throw Hegemon Azurefiend off his trail.

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Time flowed on. A few months after the last encounter.

"A realmship!" Hegemon Everworry had just arrived at the prison region, and his eyes lit up as he saw the distant realmship.

“Another Hegemon?!” Ning’s enraged sound rang out from within the realmship. “Hegemon Everworry... don’t you feel that you are all being too shameless?” As he spoke, he sent the realmship diving into the flaming passageway.

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Three years later.

“The realmship is over there!” Hegemon Oldgem and the Paragon of Swords were both in hot pursuit of the realmship, which was fleeing in panic. Every so often, it would blast into certain traps that would send it spinning, but each time it was able to quickly stabilize itself and continue to flee at incredible speeds, shaking off both of them.

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Time flowed on. All nine Emperors and Hegemons were thoroughly enraged; it was as though the only thing Daolord Darknorth could do was flee! Given how fast the realmship was, it was extremely hard for them to catch up to it.

“Daolord Darknorth is extremely familiar with the flaming passageways, allowing him to avoid many of the most dangerous mechanisms with ease. Even if he does occasionally run into one of them, his realmship is able to take the damage.” The nine Hegemons and Emperors all felt rather helpless.

Every single passageway was extremely long, and the countless passageways were filled with even more mechanisms. The Emperors had to move with care, and for now there really was no way for them to catch Ning as the latter dove here and there.

Still, they continued to waited excitedly. At least the realmship was remaining within the flaming passageways this entire time. Sooner or later, they’d catch it.

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“Mm. For now, I’ll keep the most terrifying mechanisms of the passageways under wraps and keep them off their guard.” Ning remained

quite calm from within his realmship. “I’ll keep their attention completely focused upon the flaming passageways for now. That way, so long as they avoid the prison region it’s unlikely they’ll be able to discover that hidden area.”

The reason why Ning had used himself as bait to repeatedly lure them out was because he was worried that if he just remained in hiding, the Emperors and Hegemons would begin to search the area with such care that they might scour every inch of the prison region. The hidden region was extremely difficult to locate, and Ning himself had only found it thanks to the guidance of Whitethaw... but his foes were Hegemons!

If an entire host of Hegemons chose to slowly and patiently search a region, they might one day be lucky enough to discover it. Once they did, they’d be able to take over that hidden region, at which point Ning would no longer be able to control the formation-diagram!

The chances of this happening were quite low, but Ning didn’t dare to take the risk.

“I need them to know that I’m in the flaming passageways. I need to focus their attentions on me. That way, they won’t search the prison region. Once a few more Hegemons and Emperors arrive, it’ll be time for me to make my move.” Ning was more than patient.

Chapter 15: The Second Batch

Within the realmship, located inside one of the flaming passageways inside the Jadefire Realm. Ji Ning was seated inside the realmship, drinking some wine. The fragrance of the wine filled the entire vessel, while the Protector stood solemnly by his side.

“Whitethaw, sit down and have some wine?” Ning said with a relaxed smile.

“I’m a golem. I don’t need to drink wine,” Whitethaw said flatly.

Ning shook his head. “That’s where you are wrong. I don’t ‘need’ to drink wine either, but I still ‘like’ to drink wine. We still need to have hobbies, you know. Come, come! I have plenty of precious wine stored up. Have a taste of all of them.”

“No need.” Whitethaw continued to stand there by himself.

“I order you to sit down.” Ning frowned.

“Yes, Master.” Whitethaw sat down obediently.

“Drink.” Ning pointed at the wine goblet in front of him.

Whitethaw picked up the goblet and dutifully drank the wine, then frowned and said in a low voice, “I don’t like it. I tried it back when I followed my previous master, ‘Daoist Bluestone’. I didn’t like it then, I don’t like it now.”

“Eh?!” Ning was truly surprised. He waved his hand, causing a hundred different wine goblets to appear before him as well as more than a hundred gourds of wine. Wine flew out from each gourd, filling each one of the goblets.

“Try them all. I refuse to believe this. Your body should’ve been constructed perfectly, including your senses. How could you have no taste for wine whatsoever? I wager Daoist Bluestone just didn’t let you try enough types, which is why you didn’t run into anything you like,” Ning said. “Drink them all up, one cup at a time.”

Whitethaw dutifully picked up one goblet after another, draining them in succession. A look of bewildered resignation was on his straightforward face. Why was this master of his forcing him to drink wine?

“All done.” Whitethaw quickly finished all of the wine. He remained quite calm.

“Again.” Ning refused to believe this. Cultivators drank wine when they had nothing better to do, and so Ning had plenty of wine on him at all times. He had acquired large reserves and stockpiles from the Daolords and Eternal Emperors he had defeated as well.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Ning continued to pour, while Whitethaw continued to drink. After drinking for over two hours, Whitethaw suddenly shivered when he took a sip of wine and said, “Master, this one is good! I like this one!”

“Oh?” Ning was surprised. He waved his finger, causing some liquid to fly out of a gourd of wine off in the distance and into Ning’s mouth. A pungent, sour, acidic taste instantly overfilled his mouth, followed by an absolutely foul aftertaste. It was so rancid that Ning couldn’t help but twitch, and he immediately shut his mouth and turned to stare at Whitethaw: “This one? You like this one?!”

Ning liked all types of wine. Some wine was lightly flavored but had lasting aftertastes, others had flavors that permeated the entire body. He also enjoyed wine that would plunge his body and soul into a cool state of refreshedness... but he absolutely hated sour, acidic, and incredibly pungent wine like this. Even Ning himself wasn’t sure where he had found this wine; today was the first time for him to even bring it out of storage.

“That’s absolutely disgusting.” Ning shook his head.

“It’s good!” Whitethaw stared at Ning, wide-eyed.

“...Fine. The Chaosverse truly is filled with all sorts of marvels, including golems who like to drink wine like this. And who would even create this type of wine?! Ah, forget it. Come, let’s drink together!” Ning laughed. He finally had someone to drink with him now. Life had been quite boring recently. Hide-and-seek with these Hegemons and Emperors was

extremely boring. It was too simple, given that his divine power clone was in perpetual control of the flaming passageways.

“Master, do you have the feeling that something seems off?” Whitethaw quickly began to grow more loquacious as the happy feeling from the wine flooded his body.

“Something seems off?” Ning was startled. “What do you mean?”

“The Hegemons in the flaming passageways here in the Jedefire Realm aren’t working as hard as in the past in trying to hunt you down,” Whitethaw said.

Ning laughed. “Of course. It has been eighty thousand years! By now, they’ve realized that catching me will be virtually impossible. There’s no need for to chase as frantically as they would’ve in the past.”

“But they haven’t exactly relaxed either. They’ve started to set up a few small traps in the various passageways, such as masking formations that hide some of the terrifying mechanisms inherent within the passageways. They’ve actually put down a few special-purpose formations to deal with me.” Ning shook his head. “They don’t realize that all of their movements are under my observation and control.”

“Master, there are already eight Hegemons and ten other Emperors present. In the end, how many of them will have arrived in total for the sake of the realmship?” Whitethaw said, worried.

Ning nodded slowly. He felt a sense of pressure as well. 80,000 years... Hegemon Wuye and Hegemon Fogsun were both controlling realmships and thus both had delivered a first batch of Hegemons and Emperors to the Flamedragon Realmverse during this period of time. Hegemon Wuye’s first batch had included five Hegemons and four Emperors, while Hegemon Fogsun’s first batch included three Hegemons and six Emperors.

“Based on my calculations, the second batches should arrive soon,” Ning said seriously. “I hope they will separately enter the flaming passageways as well. If they do so, I’ll have a chance to stop them. My fear is that they will join forces and advance as one unit.”

Hegemons had many and varied techniques. If four or five of them worked together, even if Ning unleashed the full power of the mechanisms in the flaming passageways he still wouldn't necessarily be able to stop all five of them!

After all, there were Hegemons who were extremely skilled in defense, so much so that they were a match for Otherverse Lords in this regard! Others specialized in speed, while still others specialized in karma. When they pooled their talents together, they would become extremely difficult to deal with.

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120,000 years after the public revealing of the existence of the realmship. Hegemon Wuye was sending the second batch of Hegemons and Emperors over on this date.

They had arrived next to a blazing star that looked like a fiery ball of heat. A spatial tear appeared in the void next to the star, followed by a realmship blinking through and coming to a halt next to it.

"Gentlemen, we have arrived. Based on our latest information, Daolord Darknorth has remained in hiding within the Jadefire Realm this entire time, while none of the Hegemons or Emperors who have already reached the Jadefire Realm have been able to take the realmship from him. You all still stand a very good chance," Hegemon Wuye said with a laugh.

"Regardless of who ends up with the realmship, you've already made a fortune in treasure from this escapade, brother Wuye," one of the eight figures said upon flying out of the realmship.

"I borrowed this realmship from my master. I'm going to give most of the treasure to him!" Hegemon Wuye glared at him. "Not gonna waste words with you. I need to go pick up the final batch. I have a long road ahead of me." As he spoke, he took control of the realmship and flew off into the distance.

Eight figures remained there within the void, their auras mighty. One of them, a devilishly handsome man who radiated an aura of cold insidiousness, let out a cold snort: "Everyone, you can go to the Jadefire

Realm. I'll be there shortly." As he spoke, he took a step forwards and teleported through the air, vanishing.

"Where is Hegemon Winterflame going off to?"

"Where do you think? Given the type of person he is, he's probably off to capture any and all of Daolord Darknorth's friends and family." The speaker was a bearded man dressed in simple gray robes who carried eight strange azure planks of wood on his back.

"Winterfire always does stupid shit like this."

"Brother Blackwood, don't worry about him. I'll tear through spacetime and lead the way." Of the group of eight who had just arrived, four were Hegemons, with Winterflame one of them. In truth, his status was the highest of the eight.

"Let's go." Hegemon Blackwood, who was the bearded man with those eight pieces of azure wooden planks on his back, nodded.

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Whoosh. Tearing through spacetime at maximum speed, Hegemon Winterflame quickly arrived outside the Vastheaven Everworld. "Here we are." Hegemon Winterflame stood there within the misty skies, staring at the distant Vastheaven Palace.

Hegemon Winterflame was dressed in white robes that glowed with blurry white light. His features were handsome to the point of appearing devilish, while his skin was so translucent and fine that one could almost see his blood vessels and veins. His eyes emanated an aura of terrifying coldness.

"Based on the intelligence records I acquired, Archon Silksnow probably chased someone called 'Ninedust' into the Jadefire Realm, then intentionally released word of this. Daolord Darknorth really did choose to ignore the danger and charge straight into the Jadefire Realm. He probably fought against Archon Silksnow inside, with Archon Silksnow eventually being defeated and forced to commit suicide." Hegemon Winterflame nodded slowly. "From this, we can tell that Daolord Darknorth is the sort

of person who cares immensely about personal relationships.”

“He knew it was a trap, but for his friend’s sake he was still willing to risk his life and enter the Jadefire Realm... hmph. Headstrong, sentimental fools like him are the easiest to deal with.” Hegemon Winterflame’s eyes glowed with cold light. “The Ninedust Sectlord has probably already been rescued from the Jadefire Realm by Darknorth... and the other friends Darknorth care about all probably reside in his clan, Vastheaven Palace!”

Hegemon Winterflame stared at the distant Vastheaven Palace: “All I need to do is to abduct everyone in Vastheaven Palace. The World-level cultivators, the Daolords, the Emperors... I’ll abduct them all and force Daolord Darknorth to give me the realmship in exchange for them. Given his personality, there’s a chance he’ll accept.”

Chapter 16: First Meeting with Winterflame

“Those other Hegemons and Emperors arrived much earlier than I did, but they accomplished nothing at all. Those fools... all they know is to try their luck in the Jadenfire Realm. I really wonder if they have any brains at all.” Hegemon Winterfire shook his head and smirked.

It was normal for Hegemons to get involved in a competition for a realmship, much like how Daolords would plunder a World-level cultivators who somehow managed to acquire the fruits of Crimsonwave Temple. Amongst cultivators, if you weren’t strong enough then you didn’t deserve to hold good enough treasures.

But... Hegemons stood at the very apex of power in any major organization! They generally had their own sense of pride and cared tremendously about face. Realmships were incredibly valuable, and for them to attack with a Daolord for the sake of winning a realmship was nothing. But to go capture that Daolord’s friends and then use them to coerce him? This was absolutely shameful! Figures as exalted as Hegemons generally did not have the face to do something like this.

Slightly less elevated figures such as Archon Silksnow might well decide to carry out such shameless acts, but it was clear from Ning’s power that there was no chance for non-Hegemonic Emperors to do anything to Vastheaven Palace! In addition, even if they did make the attempt they wouldn’t necessarily succeed; could it be that Daolord Darknorth wouldn’t make any arrangements of his own?

This sort of behavior was both shameful as well as unlikely to succeed, which was why the Hegemons chose to head to Jadenfire Realm rather than Vastheaven Palace. Only truly shameless and insidious figures like Hegemon Winterflame would choose such a course of action.

Hegemons generally were extremely prideful figures who cared tremendously about face, but every so often there would be an exception! Hegemon Winterflame was one such exception.

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Within Vastheaven Palace. The brothers of Vastheaven Palace were all gathered together, drinking and eating and discussing the Dao with each other. Ning's avatar, Ninedust's avatar, and Emperor Solesky all sat off to one side.

Boom! Suddenly, a terrifying level of power descended upon the palace. Ning's avatar raised its head, only to see a snow-white silver-scaled claw descend upon them from the skies, emanating an aura of endless, invisible frost. Even spacetime had been completely frozen by the pressure, and a bone-piercing chill instantly pervaded the entire palace. This caused Ning's face to turn completely pale.

"Someone came!" Ning shouted mentally, "Enter my estate-world for now." As he spoke, he waved his hand. Emperor Solesky, Ninedust's avatar, Daolord Battlemaster... none of them fought back at all, allowing Ning to draw them into his estate-world. Ning had already made preparations for this eventuality, after all.

He had attracted attention from fifteen realmverses and even some itinerant wandering Hegemons; he naturally had to make complete preparations for both Vastheaven Palace and the Three Realms. Ning had actually gone so far as to create a second avatar!

It must be remembered that Ning's true body and his Primaltwin were each capable of maintaining a 'peak' avatar! Thus, he chose to create a brand new avatar to stand guard over the Three Realms as well.

Boom! The countless runes and barriers covering Vastheaven Palace began to crack and shatter as the enormous silvery-white scaled claws rent through the skies. Ning's avatar flickered slightly as he used his Shadowless evasion-art to arrive in the air outside.

Cold energy billowed everywhere, forcing Ning to reveal himself despite his Shadowless evasion-art. Ning stood there in the air, gazing at the devilishly handsome man in the distance with alabaster skin who radiated an aura of coldness.

"So it is Hegemon Winterflame," Ning said. "Hegemon Winterflame, why

have you come to Vastheaven Palace?”

“Hmph.” Hegemon Winterflame’s eyes were filled with cold malice. “Daolord Darknorth? So you’ve taken away all your friends and put them into your estate-world... do you really think there is nothing I can do to you now? And I think you should know exactly why I am here.”

Hegemon Winterflame let out a cold snort: “Hand over the realmship immediately and I won’t cause any trouble for you. Otherwise, your comrades are all dead.”

“The realmship is with my true body, which is at the Jadefire Realm.” Ning shook his head. “I merely have an avatar here. How am I supposed to hand over the realmship?”

“Simple. Swear a lifeblood oath to hand it over to me and I’ll immediately leave.” Hegemon Winterflame stared at Ning.

Ning raised his head slightly, glancing off into the distance towards some spacetime ripples which had just appeared, then let out a cold smile. No longer interested in wasting time on words, he said, “Keep dreaming.”

“Hm?” Hegemon Winterflame glanced backwards as well, only to see that spacetime was beginning to split apart.

“Reinforcements? No reinforcements will make it in time,” Hegemon Winterflame roared angrily. Whoosh! He manifested a ball of white fire out of nowhere, sending it sweeping through the skies. In front of the ball of white fire were a series of eight silver-scaled claws, each of which held some of the white fire as they tore towards Ning.

The surrounding world had been completely sealed and locked away, while the aura of frigidity emanating from the white fire caused even Ning’s avatar to feel amazed.

Boom! Faced with those eight silver-scaled claws and the white fire they brought, Ning felt a sense of tremendous danger. The white fire in particular was something unique to Hegemon Winterflame alone; it was known as the ‘winterflame’.

Hegemon Winterflame had been born an Aberrant special lifeform. His

true form was that of a sentient ball of fire that had slowly cultivated and increased in power until it finally became a Hegemon. The ‘winterflame’ technique was unique to him, and it could be described as an unspeakably cold ball of fire. Once it touched anyone weaker than it, it would almost instantly reduce its target to ash.

“Halt!” a low, fierce growl rang out as a titanic head appeared in the distant spacetime rift. It was Hegemon Brightshore. By now, Ning was on extremely good terms with Hegemon Brightshore. He was worried about Vastheaven Palace’s safety and thus had mentioned this matter to Hegemon Brightshore.

In the past, Hegemon Brightshore hadn’t really cared if Ning died or not, but ever since Ning had revealed his true power Hegemon Brightshore had begun to view Ning as he would his own right arm.

Whoosh. The silver-scaled claws and the flames tore through everything they touched. Ning’s avatar was almost indestructibly tough, comparable to a top-grade Eternal treasure, but it was still completely torn asunder. This was the power of a Hegemon.

“You want to stop me?” A face appeared within the midair ball of flames, a cold smile on its features. “Even though Hegemon Brightshore has arrived, he was just a step too slow. I have more than enough time to kill you and then seize all of your friends in Vastheaven Palace.”

He was a Hegemon, after all; although he was weaker than Hegemon Brightshore, he didn’t fear the man.

Boom! By now, Hegemon Brightshore’s massive bulk had exited the rift. He had six curved horns on his head, and his vast body seemed to be formed from incredibly thick layers of twisted stones. He reached out with one of his pillar-shaped arms, striking out towards Hegemon Winterflame.

Hegemon Winterflame’s eight silver-scaled claws hurriedly moved back to block the attack. An enormous explosion rang out as a shockwave of indescribable power spread out more than ten billion kilometers... but outside the ten billion kilometer range, there was no damage caused whatsoever. Clearly, Hegemon Brightshore wanted to protect the mortal

lifeforms here.

“Eh?” The eight silver-scaled claws were destroyed, melting back into that pool of white fire which then resolved into a humanoid shape.

“What’s going on? I wasn’t able to grab anything?” Hegemon Winterflame had a stunned look on his face. He felt certain that he had destroyed Ning’s avatar. He wanted to seize Ning’s storage treasures, but hadn’t been able to find anything at all.

“Looking for me?” Far off in the distance, light flowed together to form a humanoid figure. It was Ji Ning.

“An invulnerable form?” Hegemon Winterflame’s face tightened. “You, a cultivator of the Dao of the Sword, have mastered an invulnerable form?” He had sought out much information regarding Ning and felt certain that Ning didn’t have an invulnerable form, which was why he was so confident in his chances.

Ning couldn’t help but sigh. His true body was so powerful that not even Hegemons would necessarily be able to force him to use his invulnerable form. His avatar, however, had been forced to use it almost immediately. This was his very first time exposing it in combat!

“Not bad, Darknorth.” The towering Hegemon Brightshore reverted to human form as well, and the snow-robed old man smiled as he looked at Ning. Hegemon Brightshore really was liking Ning more and more. Now that Ning had an invulnerable form, killing him would be no easy feat at all. It was entirely possible that Ning would survive Jadenfire Realm after all.

But of course, Hegemon Brightshore had no idea that Ning had already taken partial control over the formation-diagram of the Jadenfire Realm.

“Hegemon Brightshore, thank goodness you made it in time,” Ning said.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Winterflame glanced coldly at Ning, then gave Hegemon Brightshore a look as well. “You might be able to hide for a time, but you won’t be able to hide forever. You won’t be able to dodge me within Jadenfire Realm.” Swoosh. Hegemon Winterflame turned and moved

to depart.

“Indeed, Hegemon Winterflame. We’ll meet again in the Jادefire Realm,” Ning called out to him.

“Hmph! Quite arrogant. Very well then, we’ll meet again in the Jادefire Realm!” Hegemon Winterflame’s voice was filled with cold malice as he tore through spacetime and departed.

Ning silently watched as Hegemon Winterflame departed.

“Something wrong?” Hegemon Brightshore walked over.

“Since Hegemon Winterflame has appeared, that means the second batch of Hegemons and Emperors should have arrived,” Ning said softly. The first batch held eight Hegemons; how many would the second hold?

Given how many Hegemons were present... would he really be able to use the flaming passageways to stop them?

Chapter 17: Divining Danger

“More and more Hegemons are arriving from the other realmverses.” Hegemon Brightshore looked at Ji Ning. “Darknorth, have you come up with a plan to deal with them?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Let’s go, then. Accompany me back to the Brightshore Kingdom,” Hegemon Brightshore said. Ning didn’t decline. This time, Hegemon Winterflame attacked; next time, it might be an even more shameless Hegemon. In the end, his avatar was just much too weak. Without the Darknorth swords, his avatar was merely on par with Archon Silksnow. This was why he had been so easily forced to reveal his invulnerable form. A Hegemon who was willing to pay an extremely high price would be able to kill his avatar; to reside in the Brightshore Kingdom would be the safest decision.

Riiiiip. A spacetime tear appeared in the starry cosmos, followed by Hegemon Brightshore leading Ning into the tear and disappearing without a trace.

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The Terror Starsea. The Jadefire Realm.

Whoosh. Seven figures flew into the giant vortex of flames and entered the Jadefire Realm. These seven figures belonged to the seven Hegemons and Emperors who had accompanied Hegemon Winterflame on this journey to the Flamedragon Realmverse.

“Hegemon Blackwood, what should we do next? Should we enter separately?” a gaudily violet-robed man spoke out.

“Brother Blackwood?” the alien Hegemon, a large and muscular man, spoke out as well.

Only three of the seven were Hegemons. Clearly, they all cared quite a bit about Hegemon Blackwood’s views. This was because Hegemon Blackwood was a Hegemon who was extremely skilled in the divination

arts of Numerancy! Although he was much weaker in Numerancy when compared to Emperor Waveshift, he had still reached a level where he could be considered number one in the Dao of Numerancy amongst those who still resided in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance.

As for Emperor Waveshift himself, he had long ago disappeared to parts unknown. He was doted on and shown great favor by many Otherverse Lords and other major powers, all of whom treated him with tremendous friendliness.

Generally speaking, everyone wished to befriend a major power of the Dao of Numerancy. No one was willing to offend such a figure. If you wished to try and kill him, he'd be able to divine it and flee before you even arrived. Conversely, if you encountered certain dangers or troubles you might need him to assist you in a bit of Numerancy divination.

"Let me give it a try," the bearded Hegemon Blackwood said, adjusting the eight azure wooden planks on his back. "However, as you all know this struggle over the realmship involves numerous Hegemons as well as Sithe relics; to apply Numerancy to it shall be extremely difficult. I tried on the way over but failed each time. Now that we've already entered the Jadenfire Realm... perhaps I shall succeed." The closer they were to 'reality', the easier Numerancy was to engage in.

The other six figures didn't dare to intervene. They watched as Hegemon Blackwood stood there, eyes closed as the eight azure wooden planks flew out from behind his back and surrounded him. They levitated there, circling around him nonstop and circulating with azure light. Countless runes appeared on their surfaces as an invisible ripple of power spread out.

In the blink of an eye, a full hour had gone by.

"Eh?" Hegemon Blackwood frowned as he opened his eyes.

"Brother Blackwood?" the alien Hegemon immediately asked.

"How did it go?" the violet-robed Hegemon asked as well.

"Don't be impatient," Hegemon Blackwood said. "Follow me into one of

those flaming passageways. Remember, we're going to stand in front of the passageway. We're not going to actually go inside." As he spoke, he flew over towards a passageway. The other six figures hurriedly followed from behind. They soon reached the nearest passageway, where they all came to a halt.

"None of you are to disturb me," Hegemon Blackwood instructed. He then sat down in the lotus position and began to calmly focus his entire mind on Numerancy. The eight pieces of azure wood continuously swiveled around him, sometimes slow and sometimes fast, carrying a strange cadence to them.

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As soon as Hegemon Blackwood and the others appeared, Ning was immediately made aware of it. He watched these Hegemons closely from afar.

"E? Not good. They are moving together. Wait, why are they pausing at the entrance without going any deeper inside?" Ning was puzzled. To merely be at the entranceway meant they could retreat whenever they chose; Ning's control over the flaming passageways wouldn't give him any power of them.

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Hegemon Blackwood spent a total of three years engaging in Numerancy. His face was rather ashen as he finally opened his eyes, an exhausted look in his gaze.

"Blackwood?" The other six looked at Hegemon Blackwood, with the violet-robed Hegemon calling out to him.

"The dangers of the Jadenfire Realm primarily reside within the prison regions and the flaming passageways. So long as we avoid the prison region, we won't be in any danger," Hegemon Blackwood said. "Thus... the main things for us to be concerned about are the flaming passageways! After physically entering one of them, my divinations became a bit clearer than before. There are many invisible forces disrupting my Numerancy, and those disruptions are extremely strong."

What Hegemon Blackwood didn't know was that Ning trained in the Omega Sword Dao. Divining anything which was related to Ning in any way was guaranteed to be a ridiculously difficult task. Given how many Hegemons were involved as well as the Sithe ruins known as the 'Jadefire Realm', those who didn't have nigh-perfect mastery over the Dao of Numerancy wouldn't be able to see anything clearly at all.

"So what's the conclusion?" the alien Hegemon immediately asked.

"This is going to be extremely dangerous," Hegemon Blackwood said softly. "I feel as though we are heading into a world of mist. Right now, I can only come to one vague conclusion... only if we stay together will we have a chance at being safe. Once we separate... we could very well die."

"What?!"

"Very well die?!"

"As terrifying as that?" the other six were all shocked. Based on what they knew of this place, the Jadefire Realm was once deadly but had now fallen into disrepair. It also had no one in control of it, which meant that it shouldn't be nearly as dangerous as it once was. To Hegemons and extremely powerful Emperors, it shouldn't post much of a threat.

"If we separate... we might be safe, but we might also die," Hegemon Blackwood explained. "But if we stay together, there will be almost no danger at all. Go ahead and decide; should we move together or separately? If you agree to travel alongside me, I'll accompany you inside as a group. Otherwise, I'll wait for the next group of Hegemons and accompany them instead."

"Together."

"Together, of course." the violet-robed Hegemon and the others all immediately spoke out in unison. With Emperor Waveshift permanently 'missing', Hegemon Blackwood was now the number one expert of the Dao of Numerancy in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. Moving alongside someone like him would be the safest choice.

"Should we wait for Hegemon Winterflame?" an Emperor spoke out.

“Why the hell should we?”

“Hmph, traveling alongside him is a disgrace.”

“Let’s go. Given the detour he took, he’ll be at least two centuries behind us,” Hegemon Blackwood said calmly. “I certainly don’t have the patience to wait for him.” Hegemon Blackwood was an extremely proud figure, far more prideful than even your average Hegemon. He had never held Hegemon Winterflame in any respect!

Since Hegemon Blackwood had spoken, no one else argued the matter. Whoosh. The seven Hegemons immediately joined forces to advance through the flaming passageways together, each using their own techniques to keep everyone safe. Spacetime techniques, special treasures, secret arts... they were put on full display as they advanced.

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“Eh? They actually have chosen to advance as a unit?” Previously, Ning had been relaxing with Whitethaw within a flaming passageway inside the Jadenfire Realm, sipping some wine from inside his hidden realmship. Now, however, he could no longer relax.

“Hegemon Blackwood, eh? I didn’t expect this many major powers to get involved, or that one of them would be able to divine a correct path of action despite my Dao being that of the Omega Dao,” Ning mused. He was on good terms with Daolord Badlands and thus knew a bit about the Dao of Numerancy. The more variables that were involved, the more difficult the divination would become.

Ning trained in an Omega Dao; each time Daolord Badlands tried to engage in Numerancy divinations regarding Ning, he saw nothing but blank foginess. It was extremely difficult.

If (for example) an Autarch was somehow involved in a matter, most likely not even Emperor Waveshift would be able to divine anything whatsoever.

“The Dao of Numerancy truly is incredible,” Ning sighed. If his foes had chosen to travel separately, they would be like meat for his butcher’s

block. Now that they were moving together, there wasn't much he could do to them.

"Since Hegemon Blackwood and the others have started to move, it'll be time to draw in my web soon." Ning then pondered for a moment, "Wait, not just yet. I'll wait for Hegemon Winterflame to arrive as well."

Hegemon Winterflame had sought to use Vastheaven Palace to threaten Ning; how could Ning let him off the hook?

Soon, after roughly 180 or so years, Hegemon Winterflame arrived at the Jadenfire Realm. He randomly picked a flaming passageway, then entered it. As he did so, Ning finally put down his winecup and rose to his feet within his realmship.

"The Jadenfire Realm's flaming passageways now have a total of twelve Hegemons within them!" Ning was able to clearly track the actions and movements of all the Hegemons and Emperors. "Once I move against one of them, I'll be exposed and the rest will be forewarned. Thus... I'll probably only be able to actually capture one of them."

"Which one should I choose?"

Ning suddenly grinned. "The strongest one, I suppose!"

Chapter 18: Captured

If he was going to rely on the flaming passageways and their traps to capture a Hegemon, he was going to capture the strongest one. Of the twelve Hegemons, the strongest had to be Hegemon Azurefiend!

“Damn that slippery Daolord Darknorth. He must have gained an extremely detailed intelligence report regarding the Jadefire Realm; otherwise, how could he have been able to throw me off with ease so many times in a row?” Hegemon Azurefiend sat there in the lotus position in the air, two rope-type treasures coiling around him. He just quietly sat there, his senses keenly attuned.

“However... sooner or later, he’ll make a mistake,” Hegemon Azurefiend said with a cold laugh. “The flaming passageways no longer have just the original traps in them, they also have the traps set up by the other Hegemons and Emperors. One instance of bad luck and he’ll hit one of them. My chance will come then.”

Hegemon Azurefiend was extremely patient. The fact that he was willing to spend such incredible amounts of time drifting between realmverses on his adventures was testament to his patience. Even if he had to spend a thousand chaos cycles here in the flaming passageways, he’d still be more than patient enough to do it.

“Eh?” Hegemon Azurefiend’s ears twitched slightly. He opened his eyes to stare towards the front, where he soon saw a realmship carefully advancing through the air.

“There it is. The realmship.” Hegemon Azurefiend was delighted. Swoosh! He immediately transformed into a streak of light that shot after Ning. He had spent more than a hundred thousand years in these flaming passageways, and was already quite familiar with the ones in the area he was in. He knew where the ‘native’ traps were and where the traps placed by the Hegemons were, making it easy for him to chase after his foe.

“Hegemon Azurefiend!” The occupant of the realmship seemed to be badly shocked, immediately turning to flee in a different direction.

“You aren’t going anywhere!” Hegemon Azurefiend roared as he chased from behind.

The realmship continued its panicked flight. Boom! Suddenly, with a loud explosion, a large amount of boulders appeared out of nowhere and furiously began to spin and smash against everything within the reach of the trap. Although the realmship was able to endure the attacks, it was still smashed flying backwards.

“A perfect opportunity.” Hegemon Azurefiend was overjoyed upon seeing this and immediately chased over. However, the realmship quickly escaped from the confines of the trap and began to accelerate once more as it fled.

The realmship fled while the Hegemon pursued. Hegemon Azurefiend used his ropes to blaze a path for him, sweeping away all dangers. Although he furiously chased after Ning and felt quite familiar with his surroundings, he still remained quite cautious. This was one of the reasons why he was still alive despite having visited so many dangerous regions in so many realmverses.

“Perfect. Come closer.” Ning smiled merrily as he glanced backwards from within his ‘fleeing’ realmship. He knew the exact locations of all passageways, all ‘native’ mechanisms, and all Hegemon-emplaced traps. When he occasionally activated one of them by mistake, it was nothing more than a pretense!

“We’re arriving up ahead.” Ning felt quite eager... because a terrifying trap was not too far away from him. This was one of the most deadly traps located within the endless flaming passageways. The Sithe had once used it to trap cultivators, then sent them off to the prison regions. The power of this trap was so great that it could capture a Hegemon with ease. Even two or three Hegemons in a group would be caught.

However, a larger group of Hegemons meant that one Hegemon might fall into the trap while the others were still far away, due to them moving at different speeds. That would be troublesome, which was why Ning chose a single target this time.

“Time to catch a Hegemon.” Ning felt quite excited. In the past, he never would’ve dared to even imagine such a thing, but now that he was in control of the flaming passageways he did.

Swoosh! The realmship instantly flew past that dangerous mechanism, which remained unactivated. In recent years, Ning had maintained control over all of the most dangerous mechanisms and kept them in a deactivated state, not allowing them to unleash their full power. This was why the Hegemons hadn’t encountered any serious problems thus far. The ones that they did see were the ones which had been revealed long ago by others.

“Don’t even think of escaping. Your realmship is mine!” Hegemon Azurefiend furiously chased from behind, attempting to use his ropes to coil around the realmship from afar. Alas, Daolord Darknorth was simply too fast in escaping.

“And here we are. Right there.” Surrounding by the countless illusions of flaming passageways, Ning’s divine power clone had been watching this entire time from above the formation-diagram altar. It had watched as two specks of light had progressed through the passageway, the first being the realmship while the second being Hegemon Azurefiend.

“Activate!” Ning’s divine power clone instantly activated the terrifying mechanism via the formation-diagram, causing the power that had been hidden for all these years to suddenly explode forth with terrifying might.

Whoosh! Swish! Hegemon Azurefiend had been chasing after Ning at high speed, and he slammed right into the area of the mechanism.

Boom! A strange ripple of dimensional power suddenly appeared. Eight different places in that flaming passageway began to glow with light which came to form a vast, illusory cage in midair. The void cage completely trapped the charging Hegemon Azurefiend, who continued to fly forwards only to ram straight into the ‘membrane’ of the cage.

BOOM! Hegemon Azurefiend was sent staggering several steps backwards.

“Eh? What’s going on?” Hegemon Azurefiend suddenly turned pale, a

look of shock and horror appearing on his face as he scanned his surroundings. He could clearly sense that he had been trapped within a void cage and see the continuously changing and transforming membranes around him.

“Break!” Hegemon Azurefiend reached out with his right hand, transforming it into a terrifyingly destructive claw that rent towards the void membrane. The void membrane made no sound at all. It simply flexed slightly like a bubble, easily deflecting his power without suffering any damage whatsoever.

Hegemon Azurefiend’s heart turned ice-cold. He had visited many places and seen many things, and so he instantly realized that even if he was ten times more powerful than he was right now, he still probably wouldn’t be able to defeat this void cage.

“How could there be a void cage here? This is impossible. I’ve traversed this passageway over ten times, and I’ve scouted out this place with my ropes right after the realmship flew past it. Neither the realmship nor my ropes activated the trap. Why did it activate as soon as I walked past it?” Hegemon Azurefiend could hardly believe it. “And I didn’t encounter it in the past either. Why did such a terrifying mechanism suddenly activate without any warning?”

It had been over a hundred thousand years. None of the Hegemons or Emperors had run into any trouble upon entering this place! If there were any particularly deadly traps here, then logically speaking some of the other Hegemons and Emperors should’ve been trapped long ago. However, there had been no word from anyone else in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, which meant that the other Emperors were all fine.

“Why has it suddenly activated now when it wasn’t activated previously? Is there someone in control of them now?” Hegemon Azurefiend could think of no other possibilities.

Whoosh. The ‘fleeing’ realmship suddenly turned and flew back, coming to a halt outside the void cage. Two figures emerged from the realmship. One was a white-robed youth with a black sword sheath on his back, while

the other was a furry, white-furred Sithe Protector.

“Daolord Darknorth.” Hegemon Azurefiend stared at the white-robed youth.

“Hegemon Azurefiend. This should be our first time actually meeting face-to-face.” Ning smiled.

“What, have you come to gloat now that I’ve fallen into this trap?” Hegemon Azurefiend said coldly.

Ning shook his head slowly. “No. I’ve come to rescue you.”

“Rescue me?” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face tightened.

“Right. I’d like to ask you a question. Would you like to live, or would you like to die?” Ning smiled as he looked at Hegemon Azurefiend.

These words stnnned Hegemon Azurefiend. He immediately called out in shock, “Y-you?! It was you?! The person controlling the mechanisms is you? I thought that some other Hegemon or major power was behind this trap. I didn’t expect it to be you, you puny little Daolord.”

As soon as he had fallen for the trap, he had calculated that it was most likely for someone to have actively unleashed thie mechanism. Otherwise, why would it have remained dormant for so long, ignoring both his ropes and the realmship but activating when he flew past? It had to be a formation that could be activated or deactivated as needed, which meant there had to be someone controlling it.

“Hmph. What price must I pay to leave this place?” Hegemon Azurefiend stared at Ning, his eyes flickering with cold light. His voice, however, remained quite calm.

“Simple. Be my retainer. I won’t ask for too long; 108,000 chaos cycles will do,” Ning said. “To a Hegemon like yourself, spending 108,000 chaos cycles wandering the outside world is nothing.”

“I... a Hegemon... serve you, a Daolord, as a retainer?” A furious look appeared in Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes as he growled, “Don’t you think you are overestimating yourself a bit much?”

“I am indeed nothing more than a mere Daolord, but your fate, exalted Hegemon, is now under my control.” Ning stared intently at Hegemon Azurefiend.

Chapter 19: Death Over Submission

“My fate is in your hands?” Hegemon Azurefiend stared past the void cage imprisoning him: “If my guess is correct, this is nothing more than an immaterial cage of barriers. It can at most capture me, not kill me. So long as I continually assault it, I’ll be able to deplete its power. I refuse to believe that a single mechanism can give birth to a permanent force-cage of such power.”

Ji Ning nodded slowly. “Impressive deductions, Hegemon. Your words were correct; if you were to fight back, this void cage wouldn’t be sustained for too long. But... didn’t you think that the Sithe would have taken this into consideration?”

“Hrm?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“With but a thought, I can create a void link between this cage and the prison regions,” Ning explained. “I’ll send you off to be imprisoned there! You should know just how deadly the Jadenfire Realm’s prison region is.”

Hegemon Azurefiend was a man who had seen many things. He knew that the Sithe wouldn’t be so foolish as to expect such a void cage to perpetually trap their foes; it was entirely possible that there really was a mechanism by which one could be sent through a void link off into the prison regions!

“The prison regions? The prisons are rather damaged, and the entire region as a whole has been breached. It isn’t nearly as dangerous as it once was.” Hegemon Azurefiend laughed coldly, “Given my power, with enough time I should be able to escape. Even if I’m not able to escape immediately, I’ll be able to ask other major powers for succor. You won’t be able to threaten me.”

“You are wrong. There are differences even amongst prisons. There are seven central prisons in particular,” Ning explained, “And although three of them have crumbled apart, four of them remain in perfect shape. I’ll send you into one of those four. Forget about you, not even Otherverse Lords who are trapped within would stand any chance at escape.”

Hegemon Azurefiend's face tightened. He had read the intelligence reports regarding the Jadenfire Realm and knew of the seven central prisons. Given how badly damaged the prison regions were in general, they really wouldn't necessarily be capable of holding back an Otherverse Lord. Ning claiming otherwise was probably just a boast... but imprisoning a Hegemon was entirely possible.

"Have you decided?" Ning asked. "Being my retainer isn't exactly embarrassing! Don't worry, I won't make this public. I'll tell everyone else that the two of us are extremely close friends who have known each other forever, which is why you chose to help me."

"And who do you think would believe that?" Hegemon Azurefiend said coldly, "Who in the world would believe that? Everyone knows I came to the Jadenfire Realm because I want your realmship, and everyone knows the type of person I am. Give up the realmship and instead become friends with you, then going so far as to fight to protect you? Do you really think those Hegemons are absolute imbeciles? Even a genuine imbecile would be able to tell that I was forced to become your retainer."

Seeing this, Ning frowned. "Then what do you propose?"

"Being a retainer for a puny Daolord like yourself would be the greatest humiliation of my life. There's no way I would accept." Hegemon Azurefiend shook his head, his words completely uncompromising.

Ning felt a bit troubled. He didn't expect that the temperamental Hegemon Azurefiend would actually care so much about face that he would discard even his life.

"How about this? Ten thousand chaos cycles!" Ning said.

"Hmph." Hegemon Azurefiend shook his head.

Ning's gaze grew cold. "A thousand chaos cycles. This is my last offer! I only need you to serve me for a thousand chaos cycles. To a Hegemon like yourself, this is an extremely brief period of time. I've already shown mercy to you, considering that you came to try and steal my treasures. If you refuse even my offer of a thousand chaos cycles... hmph."

In truth, a thousand chaos cycles really was the final offer Ning was willing to make. This was because his Primaltwin was consistently using the Autarch's stone dais within the Azureflower Estate while under the effects of 100x temporal acceleration. Thus, a thousand chaos cycles for his true body would become equivalent to over 100,000 chaos cycles for his Primaltwin... or in other words, time for the Daomerge. Regardless of whether he succeeded or failed in his Daomerge, Hegemon Azurefiend would no longer be of much use.

"Give me an answer." Ning looked at him.

Hegemon Azurefiend could sense the killing intentions rise in the Daolord before him, but this only caused him to laugh: "Hahaha! I never thought that I, Azurefiend, would be put in such dire straights by a Daolord."

"I, Azurefiend, have roamed for countless ages and have lived for countless years. I've killed as I pleased and plundered as I pleased. Lower my head before a puny Daolord and become his retainer? I'd rather die!" Hegemon Azurefiend glared at Ning. "Plus... you aren't even capable of killing me. Go ahead and lock me up. Go ahead and send me into the most central prisons within the Jadefire Realm! When the time comes, I'll pay an incredible price to Realmslord Windgrace and have him personally use the Blacksun to attack the prison and break me out."

Ning's face tightened. Realmslord Windgrace? The Blacksun was a truly terrifying weapon the Sithe had left behind from the Dawn War! Normally, it could be used to briefly create spacetime conduit that allowed for instantaneous travel to incredibly distant places, but it also had more savage abilities. It could be used to attack! Once the accumulated energies were unleashed via the Blacksun, the power would be so great that even Otherverse Lords might perish before it.

Realmslord Windgrace was both an Otherverse Lord and in charge of the Blacksun. Thus, he possessed a transcendent status even amongst his peers in the Chaosverse.

The foundation of the Jadefire Realm had already been wrecked, causing

it to be dramatically weakened, whereas the Blacksun was undamaged. If Realmslord Windgrace really did come, he'd probably be capable of breaching the core jails and rescuing Hegemon Azurefiend.

"I hear that the price needed to establish a spacetime conduit via the Blacksun is absolutely enormous," Ning said. "None of the Hegemons or Emperors chose to make such a request in order to have a better chance at the realmship! To have Realmslord Windgrace come here in person and use the Blacksun to breach a core prison to rescue you is probably going to cost even more than just creating a spacetime conduit. Are you sure you can pay such a price?"

"I cannot." Hegemon Azurefiend's gaze was cold while his voice was growling: "But I'd be willing to serve him as a servant in recompense!"

"As a servant?" Ning laughed. "You'd rather be a servant to Realmslord Windgrace than be a retainer for a mere thousand chaos cycles to a Daolord like myself. It makes sense. Realmslord Windgrace is an exalted figure, while I'm nothing but a mere Daolord... but Azurefiend, are you sure he even needs a servant like you?"

"If he doesn't want a servant like me, then in the future I'll wander through other dangerous regions to acquire treasures and slowly repay him," Hegemon Azurefiend said. "Based on my understanding of his temperament, he should probably accept such an offer! Even if he really isn't willing to come rescue me, I'd rather remained trapped here within the prisons."

"Once the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels reach this place, you'll perish," Ning said.

"If I die, I die. I, Azurefiend, have roamed the Chaosverse and have seen everything there is to see. Although I do not welcome death, I welcome humiliation even less! Daolords are as puny as meaningless as ants. How dare one of you even think to have me, Azurefiend, serve you as a retainer?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning mockingly. "Laughable. Laughable!"

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Ning stared at the icy-faced Hegemon Azurefiend from outside the cage. In his heart, he couldn't help but sigh. His greatest worry had never been whether or not he would be able to capture a Hegemon. His greatest worry was... would he be able to convince the Hegemon to submit?

"You called me as weak as an ant?" Ning said. "Do you really look down on Daolords that much?"

"What, do you think you are strong? All you could do was to trick and trap me thanks to your control over a few mechanisms. If it wasn't for the terrifying traps the Sithe left behind in the Jadefire Realm, do you think you really would have the chance to boast like this before me? I'd crush you into dust with one claw." Hegemon Azurefiend's eyes glowed with savage light. "All you can do is hide outside the cage and brag from a position of safety. How laughable."

Ning shook his head. "You underestimate Daolords too much."

"Oh? I heard you managed to force Archon Silksnow into committing suicide, right? You probably trapped him in another one of these mechanisms." Hegemon Azurefiend truly was filled with rage towards the Daolord before him. This puny Daolord was insulting him from outside the cage! How long had it been since a Daolord had ever dared to behave like this before him?

"How about this, Azurefiend? Let's have a little bet," Ning said.

"A bet?" Azurefiend looked at Ning. "What bet."

"I'll enter the void cage and have a fight against you," Ning said. "I'll rely on my own real power to fight against you, and I'll give you an hour. If you cannot beat me in that hour, you'll have lost. You'll have to accept the results of our wager and become my retainer!"

"You are willing to come inside to spar against me?" Hegemon Azurefiend's eyes lit up. He had been thoroughly infuriated ages ago, but the void cage made it so that he wasn't able to injure Ning in the slightest. That was the only reason why he had managed to hold onto his temper and waste so much time talking instead. Now, upon hearing that this puny Daolord was being so reckless and foolish as to come on inside, he was

instantly delighted.

“Fine, I’ll take that bet! But I don’t need an hour. Just stand in front of me and rely on your own power to survive for ten seconds. Do that, and you’ll have won!” Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes turned red with bloodlust. He truly did not believe that an exalted Hegemon like him, highly-ranked even amongst other Hegemons, would be unable to annihilate a puny Daolord like Darknorth.

“Agreed. No backing out?” Ning said.

“I’d rather die than break my word! Just don’t regret dying by my hands, you brat.” Hegemon Azurefiend licked his lips, his eyes flashing with blood light.

Whoosh. With a flicker, Ning flew past the invisible walls and inside the void cage.

Chapter 20: Ji Ning Battles Hegemon Azurefiend

Hegemon Azurefiend was slightly startled when he saw Ji Ning head straight inside the void cage. His lips parted into a strange smile: “Daolord Darknorth, I originally had rather looked down upon you; you merely caught me thanks to these traps, but you dared to request for me to serve you as your retainer! Now, however, I feel a hint of admiration towards you. At least you have the courage to head straight into this void cage!”

“Thank you for your praise,” Ning said with a laugh. “Soon, Azurefiend, you’ll know that I have power to go with my courage.”

“You might have courage, but it is foolish courage.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face turned icy once more as he said solemnly, “Kid, are you ready? Once you are prepared, I’m going to make my move.” Given his pride, Hegemon Azurefiend felt absolute confidence in his own superiority. There was no way he would lower himself to launch a sneak attack; he was going to crush Daolord Darknorth with overwhelming, straightforward power.

The void cage wasn’t all that large, just three hundred meters or so in diameter. Ning and Azurefiend stood within it, staring at each other in midair.

“You can make your move whenever you please.” Ning’s body flickered as he manifested three heads and six arms, all six Northbow swords flying into his hands.

“Before we begin, we need to make the stakes clear,” Hegemon Azurefiend said. “You have to rely on your own strength to battle against me. If I cannot beat you in ten breaths, I lose. If I lose, I’ll be your retainer and follow you for a thousand chaos cycles! But if I win...”

“If you win, I’ll be dead. Once I die, this mechanism will dissipate,” Ning said.

Hegemon Azurefiend blinked, then smirked. “Good.” At first, he had an

extremely poor impression of Ning, but now it began to improve. At least the kid was straightforward!

“Use your most powerful attacks against me. Go ahead. If I attacked first, you probably wouldn’t have a chance to show your abilities off.” Hegemon Azurefiend stood there, his posture stately and his aura reserved.

“Very well.” Ning stared at his opponent. Hegemon Azurefiend was covered with azure scales. He looked like a skinny old man, and his body seemed wizened and weak, but he was in truth a breathtakingly savage Chaos Godbeast who had reached Hegemony! He was probably close to even Hegemon Brightshore in power and was ranked highly even amongst his Hegemonic peers.

Ning stared fixedly at his opponent, while Hegemon Azurefiend kept a close watch on Ning’s movements as well. Although Hegemon Azurefiend was supremely confident in his skills, he couldn’t afford to lose this battle! Thus, he was going to use all his power and not slacken off in the slightest.

Suddenly... whoosh! Ning disappeared without a trace.

“Where’d he go?!” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face changed. He swept the entire void cage with his godsense, but it was as though Daolord Darknorth had completely disappeared. Not even godsense could locate him.

Although stupefied, Hegemon Azurefiend’s pride kept him from immediately attacking. He continued to stand there confidently without moving... because he had already promised to let Ning launch the first attack!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The calm region of three hundred meters within the void cage was suddenly filled with explosions. Six Northbow swords appeared out of nowhere, as did Ning. The six swords instantly unleashed an utterly shocking amount of power, transforming into sword-tsunamis that simultaneously slammed against Hegemon Azurefiend. One struck him on

the head, two struck him on the back of his knees, one struck him on his chest, one struck him on his neck, and one struck him on his face.

Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker!

“How arrogant. My Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker is my most powerful attack, and its power is close to the Hegemonic level. I might not be able to crumble top-grade Eternal treasures into dust with this attack, but I’d at least be able to crack them apart. He dares to use his body alone to endure this attack without even trying to block it? He is being far too overconfident.” Ning was rather irritated and offended by his opponent’s arrogance.

The explosions rang out, followed by a stunned look on Hegemon Azurefiend’s face. He couldn’t help but be sent flying backwards by the attack, smashing into the void cage wall behind him and coming to a halt in midair. His body, however, was completely unharmed. Even his face, which had been hit head-on, didn’t have the slightest scratch on it.

“A Daolord like yourself is actually capable of such power?” Hegemon Azurefiend was born a Chaos Godbeast and thus held tremendous advantages in terms of defensive strength. In this regard, he was actually comparable to an Otherverse Lord. He could stand there without moving and allow other Hegemons to attack him without suffering any injuries at all! His body had long ago been crystalized and refined to the extreme, and his innate abilities gave it a perfect blend of toughness and suppleness. To injure him was extremely, extremely difficult.

However, Hegemon Azurefiend didn’t feel the slightest bit smug. All he felt was shock, shock at the power of Ning’s sword-stances.

“But... it is now my turn!” With a furious bellow, Hegemon Azurefiend exploded forth as well.

Boom! Rings of dimensional power rippled out from around him, spreading out like waves of water that generated tremendously strong ‘pushes’ that swept out in every direction. This was Hegemon Azurefiend’s secret art, a truly powerful Hegemonic secret art known as the ‘Azurefiend Fiefdom’. He had spent countless aeons slowly creating and perfecting this

secret art.

The dimensional rings spread out, seeking to encompass the entire void cage.

“Break!” Ning immediately executed his own secret arts. A pair of golden wings appeared in the air, ensconced by countless arcs of sword-light. Together, they formed the Omega Sword Dao – Yin Yang, and they swept towards the enemy secret art with incomparable sharpness.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Faced with those strange dimensional ripples, the golden wings and the countless arcs of sword-light began to crumble and break apart.

“Heartworld, descend!” Ning executed his heartworld projection as well, but he still wasn’t able to prevent his secret arts from crumbling. Ning’s secret art/heartworld projection combination was fairly strong amongst Emperors, but compared to the fully-mastered secret arts of a Hegemon like Azurefiend, he still wasn’t able to keep up.

“A heartworld projection?” Hegemon Azurefiend glanced at the illusory world which had manifested around him. He was beginning to gain a higher opinion of this ‘Daolord Darknorth’ kid.

“Die!” Hegemon Azurefiend waved his right arm, reaching out with his five fingers. They stretched out like a giant sun-blotting hand, tearing through all opposition and causing space itself to bend and compress before them. Entire world seemed to be born and then instantly destroyed within those fields of compress space. This was a killer technique which Hegemon Azurefiend often favored, the ‘End of Days’.

He had no time to waste and thus immediately chose to use his killer attacks. Ten breaths was an extremely long period of time, but Hegemon Azurefiend had to use all his power to maximize his chances of victory.

“How terrifying.” Ning’s face completely paled when he saw this giant hand reach for him. He was unable to dodge, nor was there anywhere he could dodge to! Faced with such a dazzling strike, he had only one option – face it head-on!

This was the very first time he actually engaged a Hegemon in a life-and-death battle. Hegemon Azurefiend, based on the reports Ning had acquired, was most likely stronger than even Hegemon Windrain or Hegemon Netherlily. Only when actually battling a Hegemon, however, would one fully understand how terrifying they were.

All six of Ning's swords moved simultaneously. The sword-tsunamis of water began to spin, transforming into whirlpools of water that then became a black spinning vortices of darkness. Ning himself seemed to have transformed into a terrifying black hole that was devouring everything in the surrounding area. Hegemon Azurefiend himself couldn't help but secretly sigh at how profound Daolord Darknorth's insight into the Dao was. How was it that a Daolord had reached such heights? Was this why he dared to battle Hegemons in solo combat?

Slash! The giant hand struck straight against the black hole, and an extremely soft sound could be heard. It sounded much like a bubble being popped.

The black hole broke asunder, while the three-headed, six-armed Ning was sent flying backwards. He smashed against the walls of the void cage, which trembled slightly and dissipated the force of the attack. However, the counter-force from the collision was enough to cause Ning to stumble a few steps more.

"Eh?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning in astonishment. "He actually blocked it. He wasn't even injured?"

Ning, however, felt as though his blood was in a state of disarray. His entire body felt numb.

"Die for me!" Hegemon Azurefiend exploded with fury. There was no way he was going to admit defeat. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! One giant claw after another struck out toward Ning, creating illusions that they then destroyed with incredible power and speed.

Ning had no choice but to defend. In just a single breath's worth of time, Hegemon Azurefiend had unleashed hundreds of claw-attacks, each of which was filled with his maximum power.

“Ugh!” Blood finally sprayed out of Ning’s mouth, and even his skin was beginning to turn red. He had been defending furiously against the barrage of attacks, but even just one of them had been enough to throw his internals into a state of disarray. Several hundred in a row was just getting to be too much.

“What?! His divine body still hasn’t broken apart?” Hegemon Azurefiend began to grow impatient. Whoosh! His body suddenly transformed. He previously had looked like a skinny, azure-scaled old man, but he now transformed into a great beast. This was a hooved beast with four legs which was completely covered in azure scales. His head was triangular-shaped, while his body was sleek and long. The azure scales even covered his long tail, which swayed behind him like a metal whip.

This... this was Hegemon Azurefiend’s true form! He was a Chaos Godbeast. Only when he reverted to his true form would he be able to unleash his true, maximum power.

Chapter 21: Retainer

“Die.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s entire body glowed with black light as a terrifying aura of destruction swept out from him. His eyes were cold and unforgiving. This was a terrifyingly deadly Hegemon! This was the true face of the mercurial-tempered Hegemon Azurefiend. Hegemon Azurefiend had no intentions of losing, which was why he revealed his true form and unleashed his most powerful, desperation attack.

Whoosh. The beast suddenly flew forwards, pouncing towards Ji Ning with claws outstretched. Ning couldn’t help but feel a sense of innate terror when faced with this terrifying pair of claw-strikes. These claws seemed to contain the power to annihilate all things before them, as if they were the source of destruction itself. They were the source, the very essence of space and matter!

This was the most powerful strike Hegemon Azurefiend had at his disposal, the trump card he had infused all the insights he had gained while wandering the countless realmverses! Even when he battled other Hegemons, he rarely displayed this ultimate attack. In battles between Hegemons, it was rare for fights to end up being to the death, which meant there was no need to go all-out like this. This time, however, was different.

This was his most powerful attack, an attack which had fused the Dao of Space and the Dao of Destruction together in a supremely terrifying attack... ‘Genesis Annihilation’! It was an attack executed with his true body!

Clang! Although Ning was unable to completely suppress the innate fear which snaked out from his heart, his Dao-heart remained calm and he was able to face this strike with all of his power. First, he used his illusory arts. Only then did he use his defensive sword-arts!

Hegemon Azurefiend’s soul and truesoul were both incomparably strong, as was his Dao-heart. Ning’s illusions were completely incapable of shaking him.

Boom! A massive explosion rang out. As Ning blocked the attack, he could sense the terrifying force behind the strike and he instantly understood the principles behind it. The power pervaded countless different spatial continuums, seeping through karma itself. Faced with such a strike, even clones and Primaltwins would perish. There was no way to hide or avoid an attack like this.

“I can’t block it!” Ning instantly exploded into countless streams of liquid water. Invulnerable form... Shadowless form!

Since he was unable to attack this attack head-on, he would deflect its power instead! As the saying goes, if you cut water with a blade the water will continue to flow. The same was true for an invulnerable body, which was constantly changing and mercurial in shape and nature. This was what allowed it to almost perfectly deflect any force applied to it. Archon Silksnow was able to perfectly deflect the power of even Hegemon Brightshore with his invulnerable form. Only an absolutely overwhelming disparity in power would be enough to breach someone’s invulnerable form.

Hegemon Azurefiend was indeed much stronger than Ning, but he clearly wasn’t strong enough to wreck Ning’s ‘invulnerable form’.

Whoosh. Ning transformed into countless streams of water that reformed into a humanoid shape off in the distance. The three-headed, six-armed Ning looked cautiously at his opponent.

“An invulnerable form?” Hegemon Azurefiend, still in his true form, stared blankly from afar. He just stood there, completely unmoving and not pressing the attack.

Ning continued to nervously inspect Hegemon Azurefiend. Upon seeing that his foe wasn’t moving, he couldn’t help but call out, “Azurefiend?”

The two battled at extreme speeds. Thus far, they had yet to finish the ten breaths of battle.

“I lost.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s voice suddenly seemed much older than it had been just a while ago, and a rather dispirited look appeared on his formerly ferocious triangular face. He returned to his skinny, elderly

human form, a slightly forlorn look on his face as he said softly, “I didn’t expect that my full-power strike would only be enough to force you to reveal an invulnerable form. Based on what I know, you’ve only trained for an extremely short period of time and have focused exclusively on the Dao of the Sword. I never would’ve thought that a Daolord who focused on the Dao of the Sword would be able to acquire an invulnerable form. I lost. I have nothing more to say.”

As soon as Ning had revealed his invulnerable form, Hegemon Azurefiend had realized that it would be impossible for him to slay Ning. Ning had already reached a level of power which was on par with that of the supreme Emperors who were just barely weaker than the Hegemons themselves! Aside from the twelve Hegemons, there had been fourteen supreme Emperors who had come to the Jadenfire Realm. Most of them were on the levels of Emperor Goldisle and the other leaders of the Dao Alliance. They might not be able to defeat Hegemons, but Hegemons were not capable of killing them.

When Hegemon Azurefiend had first seen Ning’s power, he hadn’t been dispirited. This was because he felt that Ning must’ve focused on the Dao of the Sword; given how briefly he had trained for, Ning shouldn’t have an invulnerable form.

Now, however, Ning had actually revealed an invulnerable form! That meant that there was no chance that he, Hegemon Azurefiend, would be able to actually kill Ning.

“Can you tell me how it is that you, a Daolord, have reached such power? You clearly train in the Dao of the Sword; why is it that you have an invulnerable form?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning. “At least let me understand why I lost.”

“I am indeed just a Daolord, but my Dao is that of the Omega Sword Dao,” Ning explained.

“Omega Sword Dao?” Hegemon Azurefiend was puzzled. He didn’t understand.

“There are differences amongst Daos. Some Daolords have chosen the

most common of Daos...” Ning didn’t hide anything, telling Azurefiend about the truth of the Omega Dao. In truth, Ning wasn’t the only person in the vast Chaosverse who had developed an Omega Dao. Despite that, there were very, very few who had reached such heights. Although on occasion a Daolord would be able to accomplish this, they would quickly fail their Daomerges and die. Their lifespans were all extremely short, and so very few even knew about them.

The vast majority of Hegemons had never even heard of ‘Omega Daos’.

“So that’s how it is. Everyone knows that there are differences amongst Daos, but I never would’ve imagined that the highest-level Dao is that of the ‘Omega Dao’. All this time, I’ve been puzzled as to why a Daolord of the Fourth Step like yourself would have reached such heights in the Dao of the Sword. You might not be at the Hegemon-level, but you are just half a step beneath that level. Now, I finally understand. So it is because of your superior Dao, your Omega Sword Dao.” Hegemon Azurefiend laughed, and his laughter caused Ning to feel shocked.

“Something wrong?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“You look a lot nicer when you laugh. Why do you usually keep such an icy look on your face?” Ning asked.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face instantly turned icy once more. “Don’t get cocky with me, boy. Your Omega Sword Dao isn’t bad, and you are pretty strong. Per our wager, I’ll be your retainer... but only for a thousand chaos cycles!”

“I’ll have to trouble you to help me out in the future, brother Azurefiend.” Ning smiled.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Azurefiend let out a cold snort, then said: “Oh, right. I forgot to tell you. When you trapped me in the void cage and yammered about making me your retainer, I was so pissed off that I immediately told everyone about how you caught me. All of the Hegemons and Emperors from the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance are probably aware that you are in control of the flaming passageways by now! Hmph. That means you won’t be able to use this trap a second time.”

Ning chuckled. “That actually went without saying. A short while ago, all of the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageways stopped moving and no longer dared to enter other ones. I immediately knew that you probably had spread the word to them! But it is of no consequence. For you to become my retainer, brother Azurefiend, means that it was all worth it.”

Hegemon Azurefiend was instantly irritated again. He couldn’t even gain a verbal advantage over Darknorth. This Daolord really was a pain in the ass. Still, Hegemon Azurefiend couldn’t help but secretly chuckle as well. He was no longer feeling quite as upset and stifled as he was earlier. Previously, he had felt enraged primarily because he felt as though he was being insulted. Now that Ning had revealed his true power, Hegemon Azurefiend had lost his wager. There was nothing more for him to complain about. Finding out that Ning walked the path of the Omega Sword Dao had actually resulted in him feeling some admiration towards Ning.

He had lost his bet, and so he would temporarily become the retainer to a Daolord who walked the path of an Omega Dao. This wasn’t so bad. Dazzling Daolords like on this caliber were even rarer than Hegemons, after all.

“Go ahead and give me an oath to swear,” Hegemon Azurefiend said. “Hurry up and set up an oath. After swearing it, I’ll be your retainer for the next thousand chaos cycles.”

“Very well.” Ning felt a surge of joy in his heart.

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“What? Daolord Darknorth is actually in control of the mechanisms and traps inside the flaming passageways of the Jadenfire Realm? Hegemon Azurefiend fell into one of them?” Hegemon Dawnruler, Hegemon Everworry, Hegemon Oldgem, Hegemon Blackwood, Hegemon Winterflame... all of the Hegemons and the many Emperors were all scared silly by this.

“No wonder we weren’t able to capture him despite spending so much

time here.”

“He’s actually secretly in control of the flaming passageways?”

“Is this information real? Is it perhaps a deception?”

The Hegemons and Emperors all had their own responses to this information. The Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, however, was in a state of absolute bedlam. An entire host of Hegemons and Emperors had charged into the Jadenfire Realm to capture Daolord Darknorth. Everyone felt certain that he was nothing more than a fish for the fisherman to catch! Who would’ve thought that he was actually a sea monster in disguise? Now that he revealed his fangs and his claws, he stunned all sixteen of the realmverses.

If he was in control of the flaming passageways, didn’t that mean that the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageways were in serious trouble?

“I know what type of person Hegemon Azurefiend is. Although he’s temperamental, he’s extremely proud. There’s no way he’d make up a lie like this.”

“Be careful, everyone. Stay right where you are and don’t move. So long as we don’t move around, Daolord Darknorth won’t be able to use those mechanisms against us.”

“Are we supposed to just sit here forever without moving?”

The major powers were all connected to the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance in their own ways. They were naturally able to send messages to each other as well.

Suddenly...

“Greetings, Hegemons and Emperors...” a booming voice suddenly rang out through every single one of the countless flaming passageways. Ning’s divine power clone had sent its Immortal energy into the formation-diagram, causing his voice to echo through every part of every passageway.

The faces of the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageway all tightened when they heard this voice.

“I’m Daolord Darknorth, the person all of you have come here to kill.” Ning’s voice echoed sonorously through every inch of the flaming passageways. “In the past, no feuds or grudges existed between us, and I never wished to be your enemies. However... all of you have travelled all the way here from your respective realmverses, delving into the Jadefire Realm to kill me and seize my treasures. Am I suppose to just let this slide, gentlemen? Everyone in the outside world would say that I, Daolord Darknorth, am a spineless pushover. Gentlemen... what do you view as being the best solution to this?”

Chapter 22: Price

The Hegemons and Emperors were scattered throughout the various flaming passageways. They were all able to hear what Ji Ning said, but none of them were in a rush to respond. Instead, they began to use their Primaltwins, avatars, retainers, and various communication methods back in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

“I heard Daolord Darknorth’s voice. He seems to be threatening us.”

“I heard it as well.”

“Right, I also heard him.”

“We were all able to hear him. It seems as though Daolord Darknorth’s voice has permeated every single part of the flaming passageways! This is proof that he does indeed exercise control over the flaming passageways.”

“Everyone, what do you think we should do? The flaming passageways are filled with such danger that even Hegemon Azurefiend was trapped. Any of us might fall as well. The only thing we can do seems to be stay where we are and not move at all.”

“Are we supposed to just bend over and admit defeat?”

“Don’t worry. We have so many Hegemons here, while Darknorth is nothing more than a single Daolord. He won’t dare to go too far.” The Hegemons and Emperors continued to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

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Ning’s voice continued to echo through the flaming passageways: “Hegemons and Emperors, by now you should have already verified that I’m telling the truth.”

“Then what do you wish of us?”

“Go ahead and tell us what you want.”

The Hegemons and Emperors were all able to maintain their composure.

They were all powerful lords and rulers in their own rights, after all.

“Haha, I, Daolord Darknorth, am not the wild and unbridled sort.” Ning’s laughter rang out within the ears of every single Hegemon and Emperor. “I won’t ask for too much. You’ve come here to kill me and take my treasures, and I hear that you all came via realmship. I imagine you already paid quite a price just to make it here. All you need to do is pay me the same price you paid to travel to the Flamedragon Realmverse, and I’ll permit you all to leave.”

“This bit of price might pain you a bit, but it’s not too excessive. If you are willing to pay the price, I’ll immediately let you leave. If you are unwilling to pay any price whatsoever... well, then there’ll be nothing I can do. I can’t just let you leave like this. I, Daolord Darknorth, am not someone to be abused by others without repercussion.” Ning’s voice echoed throughout every part of the flaming passageways.

This was a request which Ning had put quite a bit of thought into. Hegemon Azurefiend had already publicly revealed Ning’s abilities, making it so that all the Hegemons and Emperors would be on their guard. Some would even be temporarily immobilized, making it impossible for Ning to attack them for now. If pushed too hard, they could simply pay the price needed to ask Realmlord Windgrace to come over and rescue them one-by-one.

“Hmph. Daolord Darknorth... I’m impressed that a trifling Daolord like yourself was able to control the flaming passageways. However... now that we already know what you are capable of, you are no longer a threat to us.” Hegemon Dawnruler stood in the air within a flaming passageway: “If you are wise, you would immediately swear a lifeblood oath not to act against us and let us leave safely. That way, it can even be said that we are on friendly terms with each other! Otherwise... if you choose to antagonize all these Hegemons and Emperors, the repercussions shall be far beyond what a trifling Daolord like yourself can endure.”

“Daolord Darknorth, you might be forgetting something.” Hegemon Winterflame said in a cold voice, “Only part of the Hegemons and Emperors are trapped within the flaming passageway! A large number

have yet to arrive. Once they do get here, they will travel together and work together. There's no way the flaming passageways will be able to withstand the combined might of that many Hegemons and Emperors working in concert. They'll be able to rescue all of us with ease, and you'll be faced with over twenty Hegemons and many Emperors working together to hunt you down. You won't even have a place to run. Even the flaming passageways of the Jadefire Realm will probably be rent asunder once more!"

"Daolord Darknorth, you should know your own limits."

"Trying to threaten all of us Hegemons and Emperors at the same time? You really are quite bold."

Quite a few of the Hegemons and Emperors began to speak out. Clearly, they were unwilling to bow their heads before a Daolord. If they were on their own and had been captured, they probably would've lowered their heads, admitted defeat, and then handed over some treasures. But given how many of them were trapped here together, they felt certain that Daolord Darknorth wouldn't dare to offend them.

"Gentlemen, you came for me and are now trapped in the flaming passageways that I control. I need but nod and all of you can depart safely... but you aren't willing to pay any price at all for that? Do you really think that I'm someone you can so easily mistreat? Hmph. Very well, then. I'll meet you all one-by-one." Ning fell silent, having nothing further to say.

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Another part of the flaming passageways. Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend were seated together within Ning's realmship, drinking some wine together.

"Hm? Not bad." Hegemon Azurefiend took a sniff of the wine in his glass, a relaxed look on his face. He then took a single small sip.

"How'd it go? Didn't work, did it?" Hegemon Azurefiend smirked.

"They are all tough old bastards. They weren't willing to pay any price at

all.” Ning drank some wine, a cold light flashing through his eyes. “It seems I’ve been too nice to them. They really do think I’m a pushover.”

“So you’ve finally thought it through, eh?” Hegemon Azurefiend lidded his eyes as he continued to drink the wine.

Ning glanced at Azurefiend. The skinny, shriveled old man looked so vulgar and obscene as he enjoyed his wine, but he was actually an incredibly powerful Chaos Godbeast Hegemon who was close to Hegemon Brightshore in power! Still, Ning was in a superb mood. Now that Azurefiend was his retainer, it would be much easier for him to deal with Archon Silksnow’s final act of revenge.

“Let’s go and meet with them. Let’s visit Hegemon Dawnruler first,” Ning said.

Swoosh. The realmship transformed into a streak of light that advanced through the flaming passageways, darting through the winding paths at incredible speeds without encountering any mechanisms at all.

“I never would’ve imagined that one would be able to travel through these flaming passageways in such a smooth, unimpeded fashion. We didn’t run into any problems at all.” Hegemon Azurefiend stared at the outside, then sighed, “When I was chasing after you, it appears you intentionally ‘ran into’ a few traps. I was quite excited when I saw it, back then. It appears you were playing with me the entire time.”

“I had no choice. I wasn’t strong enough to deal with you head-on, and so I had to play a few tricks with my control over the flaming passageways. Now that I’m strong enough, there’s no need for me to continue to play hide-and-seek.” Ning sighed. “With you here, brother Azurefiend, I can finally bring a true end to this matter.”

“Mm.” Hegemon Azurefiend nodded in a self-satisfied manner, showing not one ounce of humility. “Now that I am your retainer... once word spreads, the Hegemons and Emperors will all be dissuaded from even harboring designs on your realmship.”

If a Hegemon held a realmship, the other Hegemons wouldn’t think to try and take it. This was because killing a Hegemon was simply far too

difficult. Generally speaking, it would take either an Otherverse Lord or an entire host of Hegemons working together to accomplish such a feat. Kill a Hegemon who had a realmship? That would be even more difficult.

“Here we are.” Ning stared towards the front.

“Ah, that’s Dawnruler.” Azurefiend grinned as he glanced towards the front as well. “That old fellow has always been quite proud.”

Ning relaxed a bit upon seeing this. He was worried that Hegemon Azurefiend would care so much about his face that he wouldn’t cooperate. Ning’s worry was that even after becoming his retainer, Hegemon Azurefiend would feel embarrassed upon encountering other Hegemons that he would feel a bit uncomfortable and out-of-sorts. This was something Ning didn’t wish to see! In truth, however, as a Hegemon Azurefiend had an incredibly powerful Dao-heart. Since he had already come to a decision, he was going to accept it with a calm heart.

“Come, let us go out,” Azurefiend said.

“Let’s go.” Ning rose to his feet as well. Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw simultaneously flew out of the realmship.

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A golden-robed elder with three eyes was standing there, a solemn look on his face as he stared at the halted realmship. Hegemon Dawnruler was an extremely inflexible, grim, and dominating Hegemon. This was why he had immediately led the other Hegemons in immediately refusing Ning’s request for a price to be paid.

“Eh?” Hegemon Dawnruler frowned slightly when he saw three figures fly towards him from afar.

Ning and Azurefiend were shoulder-to-shoulder, while Whitethaw was slightly behind Ning.

“Azurefiend?” Hegemon Dawnruler frowned as he spoke.

“Dawnruler.” Hegemon Azurefiend said, “You already know the request which Darknorth has made. I urge you to be a good boy and accept it. That

way, you'll be able to leave safely and without any problems."

"You are speaking on his behalf?" Hegemon Dawnruler frowned, completely mystified. "Is this the price he demanded of you? Based on my understanding of you, there's no way you would've agreed to the demands of a Daolord."

"I've already sworn a lifeblood oath to become Daolord Darknorth's retainer," Hegemon Azurefiend said. "As his retainer, I naturally must assist him whole-heartedly."

"Y-you..." Hegemon Dawnruler's third eye bulged out in disbelief. He had been alive for countless aeons, but he had never even heard of such a thing. He stared at Hegemon Azurefiend in disbelief. "Azurefiend, you are a Hegemon... but you've become a retainer to a trifling Daolord?"

Once word of this spread, it would undoubtedly cause an enormous stir in all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. In fact, word might spread to even more distant realmverses and otherverses!

Chapter 23: Word Spreads

This was completely and utterly unheard of!

Hegemons stood at the very apex of every realmverse and every otherverse. An exalted Hegemon... serve as a retainer to a Daolord? What sort of a joke was this? Everyone felt as though this was an absolute joke which simply wasn't conceivable.

"Your third eye is about to pop out from all the bulging," Hegemon Azurefiend said with a frown. "What's there to be surprised about? Darknorth is extremely strong, second only to Hegemons in power! I had a wager with him, and I lost. I, Azurefiend, am not the sort to welch on my bets. I lost and so I will pay my debt. I have willingly joined Darknorth as his retainer."

"Y-you..." Hegemon Dawnruler was completely stunned by Hegemon Azurefiend's words.

"Any other questions?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Dawnruler.

"Impressive. Quite impressive." Hegemon Dawnruler shook his head. "Brother Azurefiend, I'm impressed by your tolerance levels."

"Cut the crap. Now that I am Daolord Darknorth's retainer, none of the Hegemons or Emperors heading this way will have any chance of taking the realmship from him. They probably won't even come," Azurefiend said. "Darknorth didn't ask for all that much from you, and he hasn't put any of you in any actual life-threatening danger at all. Even if you went to ask Realmslord Windgrace to help out... given his personality, he probably wouldn't intervene over such a minor matter and come help you out."

"So... just go ahead and pay the price for freedom. Otherwise, you can just keep sitting here." Azurefiend looked at Dawnruler, who was silent. Dawnruler knew that Azurefiend's words made a lot of sense.

Azurefiend himself was a Hegemon; he understood Hegemonic thought-processes quite clearly. Realmslord Windgrace was such a transcendental figure that he didn't get involved in any power squabbles at all. He would

only intervene in situations which were truly lethal for the local Hegemons! There was no way he would come here just because Ji Ning was asking these Hegemons and Emperors for a few treasures!

“Darknorth isn’t asking for that much either. The combined amount from all of you Hegemons and Emperors is probably comparable to just the networth of one or two Hegemons,” Hegemon Azurefiend said calmly. “There’s no way Realmlord Windgrace would be so shameless as to come here for such a small amount of treasure.”

“Ugh. Enough, Azurefiend. I’ll accept the conditions.” Hegemon Dawnruler looked at Hegemon Azurefiend, then shook his head. “The price we are paying is nothing. You, however, are the unluckiest bastard out of all of us. If there’s anything you need me to help you out with, just say the word.”

“Don’t even start.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes flashed with cold light. He was an incredibly proud figure who had wandered through countless places. Hegemon Dawnruler’s intentional show of ‘pity’ had rather angered Azurefiend.

“Alright, alright! Calm down. My mistake,” Hegemon Dawnruler said hurriedly. But when he looked at Azurefiend, he couldn’t help but continue to sigh secretly.

An exalted Hegemon serve as a retainer for a Daolord? Word of this would quickly spread with wildfire speed! The Hegemons would all spread this shocking information to their peers, which would then spread even farther away.

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Hegemon Dawnruler obediently handed over the requisite treasures. Hegemon Wuye and Hegemon Fogsun had long ago publicized within the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance as to what they would need in order to ferry Hegemons via their realmships. Thus, Ning knew what the price had been.

Ning swore a lifeblood oath as well, ensuring that Hegemon Dawnruler would feel at ease. Hegemon Dawnruler’s greatest worry was that once he began to move, Ning would suddenly activate a mechanism to trap him.

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A short while later, Hegemon Oldgem and the Paragon of Swords were staring in astonishment at Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw.

“Brother Azurefiend, you’ve become Daolord Darknorth’s retainer?” As the conversation progressed, the two Hegemons turned to stare at Hegemon Azurefiend in absolute astonishment.

“What’s with all the fuss? Go ask Dawnruler for the details,” Azurefiend barked with a frown. “Hurry up! You two are pretty strong, but with me here it’ll be quite hard for you to defeat all of the mechanisms and traps present.”

“Fine, fine. We’ll pay.” Hegemon Oldgem nodded.

“Impressive, Daolord Darknorth.” The Paragon of Swords glanced at Ning. The two truly were stunned by this. They also understood that with Azurefiend supporting Ning, there was no way they’d be able to fight through the flaming passageways by themselves.

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Word quickly spread, causing an utter storm of amazement to sweep through the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. Many learned the rough details of what had happened; Hegemon Azurefiend had been trapped within the flaming passageways, then had lost a bet to Daolord Darknorth and was thus his retainer for a time.

Whoosh.

A realmship had been accumulating power as it was preparing to tear through the Great Dark, but it suddenly came to a halt.

“Gentlemen.” Within the realmship, Hegemon Fogsun turned to stare at the other five Hegemons and the other six Emperors. “You should’ve received word as well that Daolord Darknorth is in control of the flaming passageways of the Jedefire Realm! Hegemon Azurefiend was trapped by him and has now become his retainer. There’s no chance that you’ll be able to win the realmship from him. What are you planning to do next? Shall you still go and try your luck?”

“How could something like this have happened?”

“Hegemon Azurefiend really is a disgrace of a Hegemon. He was so afraid of dying that he chose to go serve a Daolord? How preposterous!”

“I feel rather ‘impressed’ by Azurefiend. I never would’ve been able to force myself to bow my head like that. I would’ve rather died than to swallow such a disgrace.” This was what the Hegemons and Emperors were all saying amongst themselves.

Although they had all paid a price in treasures to board the realmship, and although it had all come to naught, they didn’t feel too disappointed. This had been a free-for-all amongst many Hegemons and Emperors, after all; only one would succeed while the rest would fail. They had long ago mentally prepared themselves for failure. Thus, it didn’t really matter now that they really had ended up empty-handed.

However, they couldn’t help but sigh with commiseration. Hegemon Azurefiend was an extremely powerful Hegemon, far more powerful than the vast majority of them... and yet, he had lowered his head to serve a Daolord as retainer?

Quite a few of them actually began to view Azurefiend with contempt, feeling that he truly was a shameless craven.

“Gentlemen, we need to decide what the next plan of action is,” Hegemon Fogsun said.

“What else can we do? We’ve already paid upfront. Are you going to refund us our treasures?”

“I agree. Brother Fogsun, you should refund us half. We haven’t gotten anything out of this visit,” the five Hegemons and six Emperors all chorused.

“Cut the jokes,” Hegemon Fogsun said hurriedly. “You were all lucky! If you made it in there, you’d probably be threatened and extorted by Daolord Darknorth as well. You’d probably end up paying even more!”

“Haha, enough, enough. Brother Fogsun, we’re already quite close to the Flamedragon Realmverse, while you need to take the other Hegemons and

Emperors back from the Flamedragon Realmverse. How about this? Let's just all head there together and see if there's a chance for us to meet Daolord Darknorth. All of us are quite curious about him."

"Hmph. Curious? A Daolord who was actually able to convince a Hegemon to be his retainer... what an audacious fellow."

"He succeeded, didn't he?"

"Only because Azurefiend is a coward who fears death! Hmph!" The Hegemons and Emperors continued to discuss this amongst themselves.

"Very well, then, I'll continue to head towards the Flamedragon Realmverse." Hegemon Fogsun shook his head and sighed. "What a pity! This was just my second delivery. There were Hegemons and Emperors in two other realmverses who should've been in the third delivery. There's no way they are going to pay me now. Jeeze, Daolord Darknorth... why did you have to be so hasty? Why couldn't you have waited until all the Hegemons and Emperors arrived before making your move?"

"This time, the only ones to come out a winner were yourself, Wuye, and Daolord Darknorth."

"Yes, all the rest of us suffered huge losses." The Hegemons and Emperors continued to drink, chat, and merrymake amongst themselves.

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Word quickly spread. None of the Hegemons and Emperors in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance harbored any further desires on the realmship. When they had merely found out that Ning was in charge of the flaming passageways, they had still felt hope. After all, Ning would have to hide within the flaming passageways, but a sufficient number of Hegemons working together while backed by powerful Numerancy would be able to calculate his location and then capture him safely.

As they saw it, all they had to do was to stop him in his tracks. An entire host of Hegemons and Emperors would be able to kill this Daolord with ease. Now, however, Hegemon Azurefiend stood by Daolord Darknorth's side as his retainer. This meant there was now no chance at all for them to

win the realmship.

“Azurefiend actually became a Daolord’s retainer.”

“No matter how impressive a Daolord is, he’s still just a Daolord. Azurefiend is a Hegemon!”

“I can’t believe what a coward Azurefiend is.”

“He’s willing to do anything so long as he can stay alive.” This was what everyone was saying.

Emperors felt an intrinsic sort of superiority towards Daolords. Daolords simply didn’t live long enough, and there was a limit to how strong they could become! Hegemons were supreme amongst Emperors... but now, one of them had become a retainer to a Daolord.

Even the likes of Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, and Hegemon Netherlily were stunned by this, despite being very familiar with Ning. As for the Emperors of the Flamedragon Realmverse, they were completely stupefied by these rumors.

These rumors spread across the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance like wildfire, then reached out to spread to even more realmverses. This was considered a fascinating bit of gossip by major powers. As a result, there were now many major powers in distant realmverses who had never visited the Flamedragon Realmverse but who had heard of a Daolord named Darknorth... as well as a Hegemon named Azurefiend who had actually chosen to be a Daolord’s retainer!

Chapter 24: Meeting Winterflame Again

Ji Ning continued to lead Hegemon Azurefiend and Protector Whitethaw through the flaming passageways via his realmship, entering 'negotiations' with one trapped Hegemon and Emperor after another. Each flaming passageway was extremely long, while the Hegemons were all scattered in various places. As a result, it would take months to fully sweep through all of them.

"Hmph. Those fools." Hegemon Azurefiend sat within the realmship, drinking some wine. A dark look had long ago appeared on his face. "All of them are saying that I'm afraid of death. Ugh..."

Hegemon Azurefiend didn't even know how he was supposed to refute these rumors. Was he supposed to commit suicide to show that he wasn't afraid of death? That would be truly idiotic.

"Brother Azurefiend, why bother with them?" Ning smiled. "If a dog bites you, are you really going to bite back? Just let them jabber."

In truth, Ning felt a bit awkward about all this, because the person Hegemon Azurefiend was serving as himself! There was no way he could simply 'give up' a Hegemonic retainer, and so all he could do was just try and console the Hegemon as best he could.

"Yes, they are nothing more than dogs. I shouldn't waste my time with them." Hegemon Azurefiend lifted his head up to drink some wine, only to realize that his cup was empty. An awkward look appeared on his face. Clearly, he was so focused on what everyone in the outside world was saying about him that he hadn't even noticed he was out of wine.

Seeing this, Ning grinned. "Let me fill that up for you."

Hegemon Azurefiend watched as Ning poured the wine. He couldn't help but stroke his pointed, ape-like jaw as he murmured, "I've been alive for many years. I don't care about what those weaker cultivators say, but the Hegemons who are on par with me... I can't help but care! I've made a fool of myself in front of you, Darknorth. My Dao-heart still is not strong enough."

“So long as we are alive, there will be things we care about. Otherwise, we’d be nothing more than zombies.” Ning smiled. “Caring about fate is quite normal.”

“Darknorth, there’s something I hope you can do for me.” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“Oh? Tell me what it is. I’ll do my absolute best,” Ning said immediately.

“I hope... that you will succeed in the Daomerge!” Azurefiend looked at Ning, a hint of eagerness in his eyes. Ning couldn’t help but feel slightly stunned by this. “If you succeed in the Daomerge, your Omega Dao will ensure that you vastly surpass the level of Hegemons. You will reach a level which I cannot even imagine. When that happens, I will only feel proud for having served someone like yourself as a retainer.”

Ning finally smiled. “Thank you for your kind words. I’ll absolutely do my best.”

The Daomerge... in truth, Ning was finally daring to feel a bit of optimism regarding it, primarily because the Autarch’s stone dais truly was shockingly effective with regards to meditation. He also had the countless techniques of the Sithe and the cultivator civilizations which the Autarch had left behind, giving him a much deeper foundation and level of understanding. Once he created ten Archon-class techniques, he would then gain another treasure the Autarch had left behind which would be of tremendous assistance to cultivators partaking in the Daomerge.

Thus... although it would be extremely difficult for a Daolord of the Fourth Step to succeed in the Daomerge with an Omega Dao, at least he now had a chance. If he really was able to succeed in the Daomerge, what new heights would he reach?

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The Hegemons and Emperors all obediently handed their treasures over. In the end, even the group of Hegemons led by the Numerancy-focused Hegemon Blackwood chose to bow their heads and hand over the treasures. Hegemon Blackwood’s divinations had told them that it would be impossible for their group to securely leave this place with Hegemon

Azurefiend causing trouble for them.

The Hegemons made certain requests of Ning as well. In exchange for handing over their treasures, they all wanted Ning to swear oaths guaranteeing their safety. They wanted to make sure that Ning couldn't suddenly backstab them as they began to leave. Ning, in turn, asked the fleeing Hegemons and Emperors to swear oaths not to come back in the future for revenge.

Both sides swore the relevant oaths. Only then did each feel faith in the other.

In the blink of an eye, more than two months had gone by.

"Just one Hegemon left," Ning said.

"There's one more left? Who?" Azurefiend asked.

"Winterflame." Ning grinned.

"Hegemon Winterflame?" Azurefiend nodded slowly. "He's an extremely shameless fellow, but he's quite strong. He'll be hard to deal with."

Ning sent the realmship towards the direction of Hegemon Winterflame. While flying over, Azurefiend suddenly realized that something was wrong: "Darknorth, why are we going backwards? Aren't we going to meet Winterflame?"

"Yes, we're moving straight towards him right now," Ning said.

"Winterflame is located at the very end of this passageway, right after that turn in the corridor!"

"What? He's right there? But we went past here earlier. Why didn't we go speak to him and instead moved around him? That was unnecessary." Azurefiend was puzzled. He didn't really care about having 'wasted' a day or two, but this entire time Ning had 'swept' through the Hegemons and Emperors using the most direct paths possible. Why had they wasted a day or two on Hegemon Winterflame?

"Because he's different from the other Hegemons and Emperors," Ning said coldly.

“What, is there a feud between the two of you?” Hegemon Azurefiend could sense a hint of anger emanating from Ning.

Ning nodded. “He once assaulted my avatar and tried to abduct my clan, ‘Vastheaven Palace’, to use its disciples as hostages against me.”

“Hmph. Winterflame lives up to his reputation. As shameless as ever, I see.” Hegemon Azurefiend let out a cold snort, then frowned: “If I had a way to help you get rid of him, I would, but he’s a Hegemon who can transform into countless flames. So long as his invulnerable flamebody is active, my attacks will be of no use against him.”

“We might not be able to kill him, but we can’t let him off easily,” Ning said.

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The flaming passageways. The handsome, pale-skinned Hegemon Winterflame was frowning slightly, his skin so crystalline that one could see the vessels beneath them. “Damn. Daolord Darknorth actually managed to reverse the situation! Not only did he take control over the mechanisms in the flaming passageways, he even managed to convince that idiot Azurefiend to be his retainer. The Hegemons and Emperors have all given up on fighting for that realmship.” Hegemon Winterflame frowned, his heart filled with resentment: “What should I do? What are my options? The flaming passageways are filled with dangers. I can’t move at all.”

“Forget it. I’ll bow my head and just endure it for now. Escape is the most pressing issue,” Hegemon Winterflame mused silently. “A pity that Daolord Darknorth is going to profit by it.”

Whoosh. An ancient, rather damaged-looking realmship suddenly flew towards him from afar. “Here they are.” Hegemon Winterflame raised his head to stare towards the realmship.

The realmship came to a halt, and three figures emerged from it. They were Ji Ning, Hegemon Azurefiend, and Protector Whitethaw.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Winterflame suppressed his anger and said coldly,

“Daolord Darknorth, you really are quite impressive. All these Hegemons came attacking, but in the end you cleared the board! You even convinced one of them to become your retainer. I have to admit some admiration for you. Here are the treasures you requested. I can give them to you, but I need you to swear an oath not to attack me while I leave the Jadefire Realm. I must be allowed to leave in peace.” Hegemon Winterflame held out a bracelet as he looked at Ning.

“Hegemon Winterflame. We meet again.” Ning finally spoke out in a leisurely voice.

“Meet again?” Hegemon Winterflame was briefly startled before his face went blank and hard.

“I told you that we’d meet again here in the Jadefire Realm.” Ning smiled. “I’ve always been a person who keeps his word. I’ve had you on my mind for quite some time now, ever since you attempted to take away all of Vastheaven Palace to try and threaten me.”

Hegemon Winterflame growled, “What do you want?”

“The other Hegemons only needed to pay a minor figure in treasure, but you are different,” Ning said. “I won’t claim your life. However, if you wish me to let me go then you must give me all the treasures you are currently carrying.”

“You won’t claim my life? As if you could.” Hegemon Winterflame was rather angry. In terms of raw power, most likely only Otherverse Lords had any chance of slaying him.

“You can choose to refuse.” Ning looked at him.

“You...!” Hegemon Winterflame stared hard at Ning. “You ask too much. Half! I’ll give you half of the countless treasures I’ve accumulated over the aeons.” He was legendary for his shamelessness, but it was this very shamelessness that had allowed to build up such a prodigious stockpile of treasures.

“Either accept my offer or decline it,” Ning said coldly.

“You...!” Hegemon Winterflame was so furious, his teeth hurt from all

the clenching. Still... when he considered his situation, he realized that all the other Hegemons and Emperors had fled. The Jadefire Realm was simply too dangerous; the only person in all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance who would be able to come here to save him was Realmslord Windgrace. But not only did Realmslord Windgrace rarely intervene in matters like this, the Realmslord didn't even like him. The two weren't on very good terms.

"Fine! Take them!!!" Hegemon Winterflame had a rather savage look on his face as the bracelet in his hand trembled slightly. Clearly, he had just moved many treasures into that bracelet.

"I already told you... I want ALL of your treasures." Ning looked at him. "The armor that you are wearing and the Universe weapon you are wielding... give them to me as well."

"You even want my armor and my weapon?!" Hegemon Winterflame's eyes bulged out.

Chapter 25: Time Flows Like Water, the Three Realms Perish

To cultivators, their weapons and their armor were their most valuable possessions. Generally speaking, when cultivators spoke of ‘trading treasures’ or ‘handing over treasures’, they were excluding the weapons and armor which they normally used! A Universe weapon which acknowledged you and was a good fit for you... such a treasure was incredibly hard to find. And how much blood and effort would have to be poured into a suit of Lifeblood armor, allowing it to grow over the aeons?

Other treasures might be valuable, but the loss of them would not have too much of an impact on Hegemon Winterflame’s actual level of power. It would’ve hurt, but he would’ve bit his tongue and accepted. His weapons and his armor? Once those were lost, his power would dramatically drop.

“Yes, I want both.” Ning looked at him. “I want all of your treasures! You must hand over every last drop of chaos nectar and every last chaos jewel, to say nothing of your Universe treasures.”

“Y-y-you...!” Hegemon Winterflame was absolutely livid.

“Are you handing them over or not?” Ning looked at him.

“Impossible! How could I give you my armaments?” Hegemon Winterflame glared furiously at Ning. “I’ve already lowered my head before you, but you push me too far. Hmph. Do you really think I’m afraid of you? I can simply sit in this tunnel without moving, and your control over the mechanisms will be of no use to you. There can’t be that many which are capable of actually trapping and/or killing Hegemons. I refuse to believe one of them is right next to me.”

“There’s nothing you can do to me! If push comes to shove, I’ll just stay here for 108,000 chaos cycles. Let’s see if you’ll survive past that date!” Hegemon Winterflame glared at Ning.

“Don’t worry. If I fail my Daomerge and perish, I’ll pass the control

techniques over to others and require them to swear oaths to never release you,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Then let us wait and see!” Hegemon Winterflame’s face was ruddy with rage.

“Excellent. Honestly, I don’t even care about your piddling treasures. Brother Azurefiend, let’s go.” Ning turned and immediately walked towards his realmship. Azurefiend smirked coldly as he glanced at Winterflame, then joined Whitethaw in walking towards the realmship.

“Azurefiend, you aren’t worthy of looking down upon me, you craven. No matter how ‘shameless’ I am, I, Winterflame, would never lower myself to becoming a retainer to a Daolord,” Winterflame said mockingly.

“Winterflame... by my decree, you shall be trapped here forever until the day you perish!” Ning came to a halt, turned and said these words, then entered the realmship.

“Let’s see if I die first or if you die first!” Hegemon Winterflame roared angrily, watching as the three disappeared into the realmship.

“Darknorth, Winterflame’s completely shameless. He’s capable of saying anything at all. Don’t waste your time with him.” Hegemon Azurefiend smiled coldly. “Just enjoy the sight of his perpetual imprisonment.”

“Agreed.” Ning nodded.

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The storm caused by the news that a Daolord had acquired a realmship gradually became to calm down. However, the news that a Hegemon had actually chosen to serve a Daolord as a retainer was slowly spread to ever more distant realmverses and otherverses.

“The core of this formation-diagram is ridiculously complicated.” Ning’s divine power clone was still above the altar, carefully analyzing it. Ning’s Primaltwin was still on the Autarch’s stone dais in the Azureflower Estate, meditating on the formation-diagram as well.

The core of the formation-diagram... it required one to have reached

incredible heights in the Dao of Fire and the Dao of Space, as well as extreme mastery of the Dao of Formations. Only then would you have a chance to solve it.

.....

The Flamedragon Realmverse returned to its usual calm, and time slowly began to flow on. One chaos cycle, two chaos cycles, three chaos cycles...

Back in Ning's homeland of the Three Realms.

CRACK!

The golden-robed Ning was by the side of his daughter Brightmoon. The two were aboard a rowboat floating atop Serpentwing Lake. The golden-robed Ning raised his head to stare at the heavens. He saw a bolt of lightning tear through the skies, spanning trillions of kilometers in size. This bolt of lightning didn't just pierce through the Grand Xia, it also pierced through the majority of the three thousand major worlds.

"The Three Realms are finally about to face the apocalypse," Ning murmured.

"What?" Brightmoon was stunned. She stared at her father, shock apparent in her bright eyes. "Father, did you just say that the Three Realms are about to be destroyed?"

"Yes." Ning nodded. "Normal chaosworlds will only last for a single chaos cycle. After being destroyed, they will coalesce into 'Worldhearts' that will then give birth to a new world and a new cycle of life. Long ago, Mother Nuwa led our Three Realms to defeat the Seamless Chaosworld. A total of nine chaos cycles have gone by since then. Nine! This represents an absolute limit. It is indeed time for the Three Realms to be destroyed."

"Then what should we do? Should we move to stop it?" Brightmoon asked.

"Why should we? Destruction and rebirth are all part of a cycle, the natural functioning of the Chaosverse." Ning smiled. "And the major powers of the Three Realms have long ago established their own chaosworlds. We'll simply relocate Swallow Mountain to one of them."

“Alright.” Brightmoon nodded. These days, experts were as common as clouds in the Three Realms. It had a decent number of even Samsara Daolords. Ever since Ning had brought back the three hundred-plus Hegemonic legacies to the Three Realms, it had undergone yet another golden age. Its cultivators had exploded with power, and the rate at which the Three Realms gave birth to experts was even more ridiculously high than for the planet within the Stone Hellephant Wall.

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In the primordial chaos outside the Three Realms. There was a region here that was tens of thousands of times vaster than the Three Realms themselves, and chaosworlds were scattered throughout this region in accordance with an incredibly complicated formation.

There were a total of 3900 chaosworlds here, and they were linked together in a massive formation which Ning had developed based on his insights into the Dao of Formations. The Sithe discs had been emplaced within the formation, becoming part of it! Ever since Ning began to truly analyze the Sithe formations, he finally began to be able to make perfect use of the Sithe discs.

The power of the formations and the Sithe discs was such that it would be extremely hard for even Hegemons to breach the local defenses.

Over the course of countless years, the three thousand-plus chaosworlds had given birth to countless living beings. As a result, the denizens of the Three Realms had truly thrived.

“And there it goes.” Many figures stood there within the void, staring towards the distant Three Realms. The golden-robed Ning, Subhuti, and Windfiend stood at the front of this group. Ning was the number one expert of the Three Realms; that went without saying. Subhuti and Windfiend were incredibly talented as well; after having analyzed over three hundred Hegemonic legacies, they had merged multiple Supreme Daos together and become Samsara Daolords. By now, both Subhuti and Windfiend were both Daolords of the Third Step.

Maitreya, Crazy Ji, Sun Wukong, Jade Cauldron, Kuafu... a total of

nineteen had become Samsara Daolords. However, none of them had been able to fuse multiple Supreme Daos together. Maitreya was one of the more impressive ones, having at least mastered a single Supreme Dao.

As for World-level cultivators? They were ridiculously abundant. There were over ten thousand of them by now! Even Brightmoon had been able to train to the World level under her own power. Alas, Ning's father and mother were much weaker when it came to cultivation. Even though Ning personally guided them, they still weren't able to reach the World level. In the end, Ning had to rely on using medicines to forcibly uplift both his father and his mother to the World level.

"The Three Realms is in a golden age. We have over ten thousand World-level cultivators, which is just slightly less than the Badlands Territory itself. However, we have far more Samsara Daolords than the Badlands Territory." Subhuti sighed emotionally. "The more I wander the outside world, the more I feel that the Three Realms are truly incredible."

"Yes." Ning nodded. "However, the Chaosverse is a vast place. There are more than a few other locations which have given place to a high density of experts."

"The techniques which Darknorth brought back were of great help as well. On average, the cultivators of the Three Realms have all risen by a complete level," Windfiend said. "Otherwise... there's no way we would have this many Samsara Daolords, while Subhuti and I probably wouldn't have fused Supreme Daos together."

Ning agreed with this assessment. A good reservoir of techniques was extremely important, which was why the Aeonians viewed those three hundred-plus Hegemonic legacies as priceless treasures. Alas, Ning was now so powerful that the Aeonians didn't even dare to voice a word in protest. All they could do was pretend that none of it had ever happened.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

The distant Three Realms was slowly collapsing. One world after another began to crumble as the rivers and the mountains began to break apart.

Ning and the major powers who had been born from the Three Realms all watched from afar, their hearts filled with emotions. However, all of them were at peace, because they had already relocated everyone and everything they cared about away from the Three Realms.

“Quick, look over there! The new Worldheart is beginning to take form.”

“The Worldheart of the Three Realms.” The various Daolords and World-level cultivators were all chatting amongst themselves. Ning watched intently as well.

The vast Three Realms continued to collapse until its very core became an invisible black hole that devoured everything in its path. All of the shattered bits of world-rubble were all drawn into that invisible hole, causing it to slowly stabilize and become solid. An invisible surge of power began to spread out from it, causing even Ning to feel a vague sense of awe.

This was the power of the very essence of the Chaosverse itself.

“It has finally taken form. Is that over there the new Worldheart of the Three Realms?” Ning stared from afar. The Three Realms had already completely vanished, leaving behind a pair of glittering gemstones that were embedded into each other. Normally, Worldhearts were supposed to consist of a single, perfect gem. However, the Worldheart of the Three Realms was very unique, as it was formed from the collision of those two chaosworlds. Both gems had been damaged and lost certain parts, but each just so happened to compensate for the losses of the other, allowing the two to form a perfect whole.

The embedded double-Worldheart was dazzlingly beautiful and absolutely marvelous. Ning had never seen a Worldheart like this before. “How beautiful.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh in praise.

Chapter 26: The Complete Seven Flaming Hells

“So this is the Worldheart of our Three Realms? I’ve never seen one as beautiful as this one,” Subhuti said as he sighed in astonishment, staring intently at the Worldheart.

“It has a special magnetism to it, as though it is filled with infinite vitality and possibilities.” The nearby Windfiend nodded in amazement as well, an intoxicated look flashing through his eyes. “Every single ray of light coming from that gem is absolutely beautiful.”

Ji Ning nodded slowly as well. All three of them were incredibly talented figures. Ning’s experiences went without saying; just think about how much treasure he had forced the Hegemons and Emperors to hand over within the Jadenfire Realm! He had seen all types of treasures by now. Subhuti and Windfiend were now incredibly talented Daolords of the Third Step who were on the same level of power that Ninedust had been when Ning and Ninedust had battled for the first time. All of them were highly experienced figures... and all three of them were truly stunned by how beautiful the Worldheart was. It was completely different from other Worldhearts.

“This should be the reason why our Three Realms has given birth to cultivators of such incredible power,” Ning said.

“Given how extraordinary the Worldheart is, the chaosworld born from it will naturally be extraordinary as well.” Subhuti smiled.

“Let us see what the ‘new Three Realms’ will end up looking like,” Windfiend agreed.

.....

Time slowly flowed on. Ning, Subhuti, Windfiend, and the other major powers all continued to watch silently as the Worldheart continued its transformation. The Worldheart slowly melted away, its power dispersing into nine thousand different parts, with a much smaller remnant core left

behind where the original Worldheart had been. This was the largest of the nine thousand 'pieces'.

36,000 years went past. 9000 Gods and Fiends of Primordial Chaos were born. These Fiendgods were at different levels of power based on how much of the Worldheart's power they had each absorbed. The weakest were merely at the Empyrean God level, while the strongest was the Fiendgod born from the remnant core that looked like a miniature Worldheart. This one was born at the World level of power.

This World-level Fiendgod was born with such overwhelming power that the other Fiendgods didn't dare to approach him. This caused him to feel great loneliness, and on one day he rose to his feet and lifted his hands up, using them to tear through the primordial chaos and establish a vast chaosworld around him. His body began to grow in size as he poured all of his energy into sustaining and strengthening this chaosworld, making it grow as well.

"This Chaos Fiendgod should be even stronger than Pangu once was." Subhuti stood off in the distance, watching as the new Three Realms were born. This was his evaluation.

"Pangu was once the most powerful of the Chaos Fiendgods of the Pangu Chaosworld, but the Pangu Chaosworld's Worldheart was merely a single unblemished gem," Windfiend said. "The new Three Realms are different. Its Worldheart was formed from the collision and merger of the Worldhearts of the Seamless Chaosworld and the Pangu Chaosworld. It only makes sense for it to give birth to a Chaos Fiendgod who is stronger than even Pangu."

"But once he establishes Heaven and Earth, he shall die." Ning couldn't help but sigh when he saw this. That incredibly powerful Chaos Fiendgod was being guided by invisible laws; its very existence was for the sake of establishing this chaosworld.

Finally, the Chaos Fiendgod died of exhaustion... but he had already completely established an incredibly vast new chaosworld! The old Three Realms had been shattered into countless pieces, but the new Three

Realms was a perfect whole.

The Fiendgods warred across the new Three Realms for supremacy, and all sorts of new lifeforms were born. More and more mortal lifeforms emerged, and eventually cultivation techniques were invented which allowed them to embark upon the path of cultivation.

.....

The new Three Realms, as a fairly extraordinary type of chaosworld, was destined to live a fairly long life. Two chaos cycles went past, but it remained extremely stable.

“Odd.”

“Although we haven’t taken too heavy a hand in guiding the new Three Realms, we have left behind many legacies in the void around it. We’ve even accepted some of the most talented cultivators of the new Three Realms into our tutelage, and have transmitted our most precious techniques to them. Why is it that not a single one of them has been able to fuse multiple Supreme Daos together?” Subhuti, Windfiend, and Ning were having another get-together. Subhuti was quite puzzled by the state of the Three Realms.

Ning nodded slowly as well. “I noticed it as well. It seems as though, compared to the old Three Realms, the cultivators of the new Three Realms have on the whole a lower level of potential! However, they are still quite impressive compared to the outside world.”

“We’ve secretly guided the new Three Realms for two chaos cycles, allowing it to give birth to more than a hundred World-level cultivators. There are no Samsara Daolords yet, but this is still an impressive haul.” Windfiend smiled. “To be honest, we had to undergo a process of slowly increasing our power as well. Prior to the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld colliding, Subhuti and I weren’t all that strong! It was when faced with the threat of annihilation that I suddenly had an epiphany which allowed my flying speed to surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos. Once the ‘Three Realms Era’ began, Subhuti and I began to grow much more powerful as we spent more time training. His mastery

Dao of Spacetime became even more unfathomable, while I learned to more perfectly merge 'Wind' and 'Space' together. More time had to pass, followed by you bestowing us with those incredible techniques, before we truly rose to power."

Ning nodded. As his own level of insight increased, he began to gain a better sense of attunement towards the future and towards fate. Ning now had the feeling that the 'Three Realms Era' that came about as a result of the collision between the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld would be the most powerful era for the Three Realms. The later generations would all be significantly weaker, and not even the most supreme of legacies would change that.

"Eh?" Ning suddenly revealed a look of delight.

"It seems Darknorth just received some good news." Windfiend smiled.

"I just found the way to rescue a good friend of mine," Ning said.

.....

The Terror Starsea. The Jadefire Realm. The hidden control room.

Ning's divine power calm remained seated above the altar, staring downwards at the enormous flower-shaped 'Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram'.

"After training for over a thousand accelerated chaos cycles, I've finally gained mastery over this formation-diagram." Ning was absolutely delighted.

This had been an extremely difficult task. To fully unlock the formation-diagram, one needed to have reached extremely profound levels of insight into the Dao of Space and the Dao of Fire... and of course, the Dao of Formations.

Thus, Ning had first spent quite a bit of time analyzing the Dao of Fire. Fire and water mutually opposed each other but also reinforced each other. Ning thus chose to spend some time on the Dao of Water as well, so as to more quickly and thoroughly understand the Dao of Fire.

It took Ning a full chaos cycle to reach the Archon-level in the Dao of Water, even with the aid of the Autarch's stone! As for the Dao of Fire, it took three entire chaos cycles.

Next, Ning focused on 'space'. Ning wasn't really talented in this regard, and 'space' was an incredibly difficult Dao to comprehend. While focusing on the Dao of Space, Ning also spent part of his time analyzing the Dao of Lightning, because he discovered that the Dao of Lightning was intimately connected to the Dao of Space.

Ning was quite skilled in the Dao of Lightning. It took him only two chaos cycles for him to reach the Archon level in this Dao. Only after finishing his work on the Dao of Lightning did he focus all of his attention on the Dao of Space once more.

It took him more than two hundred accelerated chaos cycles before he was able to create an Archon-level technique pertaining to the Dao of Space!

Now, he had reached sufficient heights in both fire and space. Ning turned all of his attention to the art of formations itself.

The Dao of Formations was an extremely complicated and awesome Dao. Ning spent more than eight hundred chaos cycles in accelerated time before he was finally able to reach a high enough level that he could understand how the Seven Flaming Hells' formation-diagram worked! Thankfully, Ning had access to the many Sithe formation records which Autarch Awakener had left behind. Those techniques had included many descriptions on them, allowing Ning understand their fundamental principles and then take control over the formation-diagram.

"The Dao of Formations truly is insanely difficult." Ning was speechless. "I had the Autarch's stone dais helping me out, but I still spent over eight hundred accelerated chaos cycles working on it! If I didn't have the stone dais, I could've spent a thousand times as much time in training without being able to succeed. In other words, there would've been no chance that I would've been able to finish mastering it during my 108,000."

Ning felt a bit celebratory. Thank goodness he had the Autarch's stone

dais! That was why he had 'only' spent eight hundred chaos cycles to solve the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram.

This was proof that it was best for Daolords to focus on their areas of expertise. Ning was skilled in the Dao of the Sword, and so he trained in it quite quickly. He was also skilled in water and thunder, and thus he trained fairly quickly in those two Daos as well. Fire was a bit slower, while space had been ridiculous; it took him two hundred chaos cycles to reach the Archon level in it. As for the Dao of Formations? That went without saying.

"For me to have found the Autarch's stone dais was a stroke of tremendous luck. Oh, Ninedust... you have no idea how lucky you are as well, to be able to make it out of this place." Ning chortled. He really was delighted! After spending over a thousand chaos cycles in total, he had finally solved the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram. This sense of excitement and accomplishment truly was joyful.

"Let me see if I can control it all." Ning's divine power clone stared downwards, sending out a tendril of its will.

Rumble... the enormous flower-like diagram of the Seven Flaming Hells began to light up. Countless shadow images appeared throughout the hidden control room, and the images represented the entire Jadefire Realm! Every single flaming passageway and prison appeared, all of them under Ning's control. He was now able to activate any prison cell with but a thought.

"Eh?" Ning's divine power clone suddenly narrowed its eyes, turning to stare at the very center of the Jadefire Realm projection. There was actually another hidden region located directly beneath the prison region.

"There's ANOTHER secret region?" Ning frowned.

Chapter 27: Flamewing God

The hidden control room at the very center of the prison region was meant to control the formation-diagram which governed the entire Jadenfire Realm. What, then, was this second hidden room directly beneath the prisons meant for?

“Turn!” Ji Ning sent out a strand of his will, causing the entire outer layer of the Jadenfire Realm to rumble as it began to turn and swivel. Every single prison cell began to swivel as well as it switched to a new configuration.

“As I thought. This hidden room is actually the energy source for the entire Jadenfire Realm.” Ning revealed a smile. How was it that the many mechanisms of the Jadenfire Realm had been maintained for so long? Where did that energy come from? Although the Jadenfire Realm was able to absorb energy from the outside world, it must be remembered that the Jadenfire Realm was once capable of unleashing a Decimatus Wave of terrifying power. There was no way that the amount of energy absorbed from the outside world alone would be enough to unleash such an attack; it had to have an internal energy source to do this.

As soon as Ning discovered the second hidden room, he immediately surmised that it had to be the energy source for the Jadenfire Realm. When he tested ‘turning’ the Jadenfire Realm, he immediately discovered that energy began to flow out from that hidden room.

“What sort of energy well is capable of unleashing a ‘Decimatus Wave’?” Ning was rather intrigued and curious about this.

.....

Ning’s realmship was parked peacefully in the air at the center of the Jadenfire Realm’s prison region. The white-robed Ning was seated atop a prayer mat in the lotus position, silently meditating. As for Azurefiend, in his boredom he was drinking and eating by himself.

“We’re going to make a short trip,” Ning said as he opened his eyes.

“Have other Hegemons come?” Azurefiend asked, puzzled.

“No. We’re going to another part of the prisons,” Ning said. He was going to go check out the hidden room first, then save Ninedust; Ninedust had already waited for quite some time, a few more minutes wouldn’t kill him.

Swish. The realmship quickly began to descend through the prison region. After flying for a full hour, it reached a region of absolute empty darkness at the very bottom of the prison region.

“Open up.” Ning was in control of the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram. With but a thought, he caused the hidden room to open up before him.

Whoosh. A giant red copper gate suddenly appeared in the darkness and slowly began to open. As it did, a surge of blasting heat swept out from the other side, causing the void in the surrounding area to twist and distort like steam.

Ning was able to see the blazing heat and fire on the other side of the red copper gate.

“Ohoho!” Hegemon Azurefiend was quite excited. He said with a laugh, “I thought that the Jadefire Realm was already quite a hot place, given the many flames which fill its passageways... but there’s no way to compare those flames with this place. Let me out of the ship, I want to go take a look and see just how hot those flames are. They actually have caused space to twist and distort!”

“Alright.” With but a thought, Ning put away the realmship. Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw all stood there in the emptiness of the void. The realmship gone, they could now directly sense the waves of heat which washed across them.

“That’s hot.” Ning felt as though he had been dropped into a cauldron of fire. It was so hot that he couldn’t help but tense up, but his body was naturally capable of enduring this level of heat.

“This heat wave alone would reduce Daolords of the Second Step to dust in a flash.” Hegemon Azurefiend smiled. “Let’s go in and take a look.”

“Master, let me go inside first,” Whitethaw said.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. In terms of survivability, the Sithe Protector was probably superior to even Hegemon Azurefiend.

Swoosh. Whitethaw immediately flew through the giant red copper gate. Once he did, a look of disbelief appeared on his simple face. He then turned his head and called backwards, “Master, you can come inside. It’s very hot in here, but it won’t be of any danger to you.”

“Alright, we’re coming in as well,” Ning said. Azurefiend, however, still took the lead in charging through the gate.

Swoosh. Swoosh. The two passed through the giant red copper gate. With but a thought, Ning closed the gate behind them once more.

“Eh?” As soon as Ning flew in, he was stunned by what he saw before him. The ground was pitch-black in color; Ning immediately recognized it as being deepfire blackstone. Far off in the distance, there was an enormous winged beast that was a hundred kilometers in size which was bathed in flames. The creature’s entire body was fiery red, and it had a pair of dazzling and enormous wings on its back. Its body looked somewhat similar to that of a fiery red bear’s, but it was completely covered with countless flaming scales.

Boom! Whoosh! A deep sound rumbled across the area. It was the sound of this beast snoring in its slumber.

Its fort short legs were covered with black chains, while its wings were wrapped in chains as well. These six black chains extended off into the void, while a large amount of flames was being slowly drawn through the chains into the void.

The flames covering its body formed a rhythmic series of heat waves that swept out in every direction.

“The flames it is generating unconsciously while it sleeps is hot enough to cause the temperature in the area to be so high as to instantly wipe out Daolords of the Second Step.” Hegemon Azurefiend was rather stunned. “The actual flames themselves have to be several levels higher in power;

they could probably wipe out ordinary Eternal Emperors.”

“Even in slumber, its flames possess such power? What type of beast is this?!” Ning was rather stunned as well. He had thought that the energy well for the Jadenfire Realm would be something akin to a sparrowfiend gem. Who would’ve thought that it would actually be a living creature?

“Can that be a Chaos Primordial?” Hegemon Azurefiend suddenly said.

“A Chaos Primordial?” Ning was stunned. Chaos Primordials were the most terrifying lifeforms of the Chaosverse, birthed from the prime essences of the Chaosverse themselves. They were born with virtually indestructible bodies, and they possessed inconceivable levels of power. However, they were rather unintelligent, perhaps comparable to ordinary mortal children at best. They wandered the Chaosverse alone, and when they occasionally ran into a realmverse they would devour the entire realmverse whole.

As a result, quite a few realmverses had been destroyed by Chaos Primordials over the course of aeons! Alas, there was nothing that could be done; even terrifying Otherverse Lords would only at best be able to stay alive in the face of a Chaos Primordial attack. There was nothing which could stop them save the Autarchs.

Even if a major power like Realmslord Windgrace ran into a Chaos Primordial which was devouring a realmverse, he would have no choice but to just watch powerlessly as it all happened.

“Chaos Primordials love to eat verdant azuresouls.” This thought suddenly came to Ning’s mind. He had acquired a verdant azuresoul from that beastworld, one which Autarch Bolin had transformed into a magic treasure. So long as a Chaos Primordial ate it, it would fall under Ning’s control and become his servant.

“It has to be a Chaos Primordial, right? I can’t think of any other creature that would be this powerful.” Hegemon Azurefiend wasn’t certain either, because he had never encountered a Chaos Primordial before either.

“Yes, that is a Chaos Primordial. It called itself the ‘Flamewing God’,” the

nearby Protector Whitethaw suddenly said.

“Flamewing God?” Ning and Azurefiend both turned to look at Whitethaw.

“Yes.” Whitethaw nodded. “Prior to the Dawn War, when the Sithe were in the prime of their power, they discovered this Chaos Primordial. Some of the most terrifying and powerful Sithe experts set off to capture it, then imprisoned it within an enormous Sithe prison that was meant for imprisoning major powers. I once entered that place with my master and saw the ‘Flamewing God’ myself. Back then, one of the prison gaolers introduced it to us and said that it was incredibly strong. Three Sithe Exalts had to work together in order to capture it.”

Ning nodded. Having chatted with Whitethaw in the past, he knew that the most powerful members of the Sithe race had been the ones known as the ‘Exalts’. They were far more powerful than even the Otherverse Lords of the cultivator civilizations! But of course, they still were far from being a match for the Autarchs.

The most powerful experts on the side of the cultivators had been the Autarchs, and it was the Autarchs who had led them to victory in exterminating the Sithe and their Exalts.

“I didn’t expect for the Flamewing God to have been brought here,” Whitethaw said.

Ning sighed in approval. To use a Chaos Primordial as an energy source... no wonder the Jadenfire Realm had been so terrifying in its prime! Every single Decimatus Wave was capable of annihilating anything below the Autarch level of power with ease. This was something that was even more terrifying than a Chaos Primordial itself, and it was thanks to the power of the formation that drew from its energies.

“Then the six chains binding it...” Ning stared from afar. The six chains ensured that this powerful Chaos Primordial was unable to fight back, and it also drew energy from it.

“It seems to be some sort of suppressive formation that also has energy absorption effects.” Ning scrutinized the six chains intently, studying the

countless runes and patterns that covered them. He was now a grandmaster of the Dao of Formations, but he still found this formation to be quite complicated. This was because Ning's path was that of the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram, while these chains belonged to a completely different school of formations.

"It'll be a bit tough to break these chains and release this Chaos Primordial... but given my skills in the Dao of Formations as well as the records regarding Sithe formations which Autarch Awakener left behind, I still have a chance to succeed," Ning mused. "However... prior to releasing this creature, I should first have it eat the verdant azuresoul."

He only had a single verdant azuresoul. Ning was worried that if he tossed it out, the Flamewing God might just slap it apart into dust. That would be troublesome.

Rumble... the slumbering Flamewing God suddenly stretched its wings, causing the black chains covering it to clatter. It opened its fiery red eyes, staring angrily at the distant trio.

Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw all felt a sense of invisible pressure. They hurriedly retreated, while Whitethaw moved to stand in front of Ning.

"You three keep on babbling on and on in front of me. This is starting to piss me off. How am I supposed to sleep like this?" The Flamewing God's ursine face was filled with rage.

Chapter 28: Flames

The Flamewing God's entire body was rippling with flames, but its gaze was a bit distant, almost as though it hadn't completely woken up yet.

"Fuck off and don't bother me," the Flamewing God barked irritably. But then, its blurry gaze suddenly focused and narrowed as it glared intently at the Sithe Protector, Whitethaw, standing in front of Ji Ning. The scales on the creature's body seemed to stand up, and its gaze became filled with rage as it ground out the word: "SITHE!"

"Not good." Azurefiend paled as he hurriedly moved to stand in front of Ning as well.

"Be careful, Master!" Whitethaw had a solemn look on his face.

Boom! The Flamewing God moved to charge forwards, sweeping out with its giant paws. Its massive bear-shaped body was filled with such power that a wave of terrifying pressure was generated by the most basic of movements. All spacetime ripples came to a complete, frozen halt. Ning even felt as though his thinking speed had turned sluggish, and an inexplicable sense of fear filled his heart.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The six black chains around the Flamewing God instantly began to tighten from the strain. The charging Flamewing God was instantly pulled back into its original position by the power of the chains.

"GRWAAAAAH!" The Flamewing God let out a frustrated howl, furiously struggling to break free. Its wings were fluttering, and its entire body was trembling. The six black chains clanked furiously, but no matter how hard the creature tried to struggle the chains didn't suffer the slightest bit of damage. The Sithe had put quite a bit of effort into building these chains and ensuring that this place would be able to draw from this Chaos Primordial's energy.

"Damn you, Sithe! Damn you! Damn you! You've once more appeared before me, you damned Sithe!" The Flamewing God's eyes were bloodshot with absolutely berserk rage.

Ning and Azurefiend both let out sighs of relief. “Thank goodness those chains are binding it. Otherwise, we would’ve been in serious danger.” Ning still felt a sense of fear. Chaos Primordials were terrifying creatures that were capable of devouring entire realmverses with ease. Even Otherverse Lords were unable to defeat them; they would at most be able to survive the creatures with difficulty. If Hegemon Azurefiend was to actually attempt to battle one, the end result would be him being smashed to death.

“Too terrifying. A mere wave of its claws caused me to feel as though I was in mortal danger,” Hegemon Azurefiend said with some lingering fear. “In the past, I’ve only heard of these creatures; I’ve never seen one of them in person. Now, I finally understand just how terrifying Chaos Primordials are.”

“Don’t let your guard down, Master.” The Sithe Protector continued to stand protectively in front of Ning.

The furious howls of the still-struggling Flamewing God echoed throughout the entire hidden region. Suddenly, it opened its mouth and spat out a ball of dark-red fire. The fire shot through the air and swept out to encompass all three of them.

“Not good!” Ning instantly felt a sense of nervousness. His subconscious was screaming to him that he was in danger, letting him know that even a supremely talented Daolord like himself would immediately perish if he let that dark-red fire touch him! Not even his invulnerable form would be able to save him.

Whoosh. Whitethaw’s body suddenly expanded dramatically in size as his body seemed to liquefy, allowing him to transform to become a giant metal barrier that completely covered Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend.

Whooooosh! The dark-red flames swept over every inch of the golem, but the barrier-shaped Whitethaw was able to block out every single flame. The fire continued to blaze away against him, but he was able to endure it.

“Whitethaw,” Azurefiend called out, “Are you going to be able to hold on?”

“Don’t worry. These flames cannot harm me.” Whitethaw’s voice echoed inside the protected region.

“Impressive, impressive!” Azurefiend sighed in amazement. “Sithe Protectors truly are incredible. There’s no way we cultivators can compare to you golems in terms of toughness. Although I have a formidable divine body, I wouldn’t dare to make the claim that I could face those flames and be completely unscathed.”

Ning nodded and smiled. “Any halfway-decent golem is comparable to top-grade Eternal treasures, while my own body is currently only comparable to high-grade Eternal treasures at best. As for Whitethaw... he is a Protector golem designed and created by the Sithe, an extraordinary golem that is both tough and flexible. It is very difficult to damage him.”

“Master.” Whitethaw’s voice echoed within the barrier once more. “If the Flamewing God wasn’t chained down, it’d probably be able to rip me apart with ease, given how strong it is. But since it thankfully is chained down... if all it has is these flames, it won’t be able to harm me at all.”

Ning stared through the semi-translucent metallic barrier towards the distant Flamewing God. The Flamewing God was clearly still in a berserk state as it continued to furiously belch out those terrifying flames.

This creature had the power to annihilate entire realmverses with ease, and even its flaming breath was enough to inspire dread in Hegemons. It took three Sithe Exalts, the most powerful members of the Sithe race, working together to capture it.

“What an irritable creature. It seems it truly does hate the Sithe,” Ning mused.

The Flamewing God continued to belch fire for a full hour before coming to a halt after realizing that it wasn’t damaging the barrier in the slightest.

Whoosh. Whitethaw returned to his normal form and reappeared next to Ning.

“I remember you, you Sithe!” The Flamewing God bellowed once more as

it glared intently at Whitethaw.

“Wait a moment!” Ning hurriedly called out.

“Eh?” Only then did the Flamewing God turn its attention towards Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend. “A cultivator? A cultivator who serves the Sithe?” The Flamewing God seemed to grow even angrier.

“Flamewing God, the Sithe were wiped out countless aeons ago,” Ning said hurriedly. “After the Sithe were defeated, their treasures and relics fell into the hands of our cultivator civilizations. As for this Protector golem, it fell into my hands and is now my servant. I have no connection to the Sithe at all.”

“The Sithe? Wiped out?” The Flamewing God was startled, a look of puzzlement within its narrowed eyes.

Once, it had lived a carefree life of freedom... but then a nightmare had descended out of nowhere. Three Sithe experts had appeared, and they were simply far too powerful. The Flamewing God had sought to fight back, but the three worked together to capture it. From that day forth, it had lost its freedom! In the end, it had been imprisoned here and every so often its energy would be extracted. Although it was not very intelligent, it would never forget the hatred it felt towards the Sithe. When it saw Whitethaw, it immediately recognized the golem. Its intelligence level was low, but its memory was perfect.

“Yes, wiped out. The Sithe have already been wiped out,” Ning said hurriedly.

“Wiped out ages ago. Haven’t you noticed that you’ve been sleeping for an extremely long period of time without any Sithe bothering you?” Hegemon Azurefiend said.

“Uh...” The Flamewing God blinked. “I really did take a very, very long nap this time.”

“It’s been a long time since those six chains have drained a significant amount of your flames, right?” Ning said.

“Right!” The Flamewing God’s eyes turned round with surprise as it

nodded seriously, then gave the black chains binding it a hateful glare. “Long, long ago, these chains would constantly drain large amounts of my flames. Each time, they would drain so much that I would feel extremely miserable. But ever since that last nap I took... it is true that they haven’t drained anything from me for quite some time. And now, two cultivators come to visit me... does this mean the Sithe truly have been wiped out?”

“They really have been wiped out,” Ning and Azurefiend said simultaneously.

“But the Sithe were really powerful. There’s no way they would’ve been wiped out that easily,” the Flamewing God mumbled to itself. Having suffered quite a bit at the hands of the Sithe, it continued to harbor a healthy dread of them.

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Ning and Azurefiend were both cultivators, and so the Flamewing God didn’t feel much enmity towards them. Although it had been quite some time since any Sithe had come to visit it, the creature still harbored doubts about whether or not the Sithe truly had been wiped out.

“Let’s sit and chat, Azurefiend.” Ning suddenly waved his hand, causing two wine-laden tables to appear before them. Ning sat down before one of the tables.

Azurefiend was rather puzzled. Why did Ning suddenly want to eat and drink? Still, Azurefiend was a bit of a glutton to begin with, and so he didn’t complain. He immediately sat down in front of his own table and picked up a large haunch of meat with one hand and a goblet of wine in the other.

“Darknorth, why did you suddenly want to feast?” Azurefiend said while munching away.

“I’ve spent chaos cycles meditating on formations. It’s been ages since I’ve had anything nice,” Ning said. He then smiled as he glanced off into the distance: “Flamewing, you need anything to eat or drink?”

His real goal right now wasn’t to eat or drink... it was to tame this

Flamewing God! He needed to come up with a way to convince the Flamewing God to eat the verdant azuresoul. He would never be able to forgive himself if he didn't at least try to tame the Chaos Primordial trapped before him.

"I already have food." The Flamewing God sat back down, then waved a paw. This paw had a bracelet around it, and the bracelet suddenly lit up.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Basins of delicacies began to fly out, including both meats as well as spirit-fruits.

The Flamewing God gave Ning and Azurefiend a smug glance, then began to chomp down on its own food.

Chapter 29: You Are The Best

“Darknorth, the stories say that Chaos Primordials wander through the cosmos by themselves. They are fairly dumb and are easily angered... and the only thing they like to do is eat!” Azurefiend sipped his wine, glancing sideways at the distant Flamewing God as he spoke mentally to Ji Ning. “These things supposedly will eat almost anything. When they run into a realmverse, they’ll go so far as to slowly work its way through and devour the entire realmverse and everything within it. While they wander the Chaosverse by themselves, they’ll generally create their own estate-treasures and put living creatures inside, having those creatures provide food and wine for them to eat and drink whenever they so desire.”

Ji Ning nodded. He knew all this, of course. Ever since he had acquired the verdant azuresoul, he had immediately searched for every scrap of information regarding Chaos Primordials that he could find. How could he possibly not know that Chaos Primordials loved to eat? This was the reason why Autarch Bolin had modified that verdant azuresoul with the goal of using it to control a Chaos Primordial.

“Brother Azurefiend, I acquired many different types of spirit-fruit and rare delicacies from the Hegemons and Emperors who came to the Jade Fire Realm last time. Want to try some?” Ning said.

“You’d be willing to share?” Azurefiend’s eyes lit up. Rare spirit-fruits and delicacies were of tremendous interest to major powers, but many were so rare that major powers would only eat them sparingly. They would generally be unwilling to eat them casually and in large amounts.

“Of course! Come, sample some of this wine. This came from Hegemon Blackwood,” Ning said as he picked up a large gourd and unstopped it.

Whoosh. An aroma of fragrant wine immediately spread out to fill the entire hidden region. Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes gleamed with a greedy light as he stared at the gourd. “Haha, it seems that looting from Hegemons and Emperors really is the fastest way to acquire treasures. I’ve only tasted this ‘Six Bandit Caves’ spirit-wine a single time in the past.

Hegemon Blackwood truly is impressive in the Dao of Numerancy; someone must have asked him for help and used this wine in trade. Quick, let me taste some of it!”

“I don’t have much of this wine. You have to drink it slowly! Once we finish this gourd, we won’t have any more left,” Ning said.

“Heh heh, I’ll definitely savor it.” Hegemon Azurefiend was truly excited. He really was a glutton.

The distant Flamewing God sniffed the air, then lifted its head and turned to stare in their direction. A chunk of meat fell out of its open mouth and onto the ground, but it didn’t even notice. It stared intently at the gourd of wine on Ning’s desk, the smell of the wine driving it crazy.

Although its estate-treasure held many living creatures inside who were devoted to providing it food and drink, only ordinary types of sustenance could be provided. Truly rare spirit-fruits and delicacies could only be harvested from extremely unique environments, as they were formed based on drawing upon various unique types of energy from the Chaosverse. How could an estate-treasure possibly create good food?

“We each drink one glass at a time. Take it slow and don’t even think about trying to hog it for yourself,” Ning said in a stingy manner.

“Fine, fine!” Hegemon Azurefiend was feeling quite impatient. Ning nodded, pouring them each a glass. Whoosh. A deep red liquid that was almost ruby-colored came dribbling out of the gourd and into the two wine glasses. It looked absolutely mouth-watering.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly seemed to sense something, and he turned to stare off in the distance. The Flamewing God’s mouth was open, and it was literally drooling onto the floor.

“T-this wine...” The Flamewing God swallowed, then immediately said: “Can I have some of it?” It was born with a love of food and wine, but it had been ages since it had enjoyed such fine wine. It was completely unable to resist the urge.

“No way! We only have just one gourd. There’s not even enough for the

two of us,” Hegemon Azurefiend said hurriedly.

“You aren’t going to share?” The Flamewing God was growing rather angry.

“Stop trying to scare me. You are bound inside that cage, and your flames can’t harm us at all.” Hegemon Azurefiend was a glutton as well. There was no way he was going to share the little wine they had.

“Y-you...!” The Flamewing God’s eyes turned round with indignation. It wasn’t very intelligent, and it usually just took whatever it wanted! Now that it was trapped, however, taking by force was no longer an option... but it really did want to drink some of that fine wine!!! When it smelled that wine, it no longer had any appetite for the basins of food that lay in front of it.”

“Azurefiend, this is our first time seeing a Chaos Primordial. To be able to eat and drink with one of them is a lucky event. Let’s not be stingy,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Right, right!” The Flamewing God instantly grew excited.

“What’s the point of feeding it? It’s pointless! Better to feed me instead,” Azurefiend argued.

“YOU...!” The Flamewing God glared furiously at Azurefiend, feeling an increasing level of distaste towards that skinny old man. It said furiously, “I’ll EAT you!”

“Come and try,” Azurefiend snickered.

“Enough, enough. Let’s not fight. Flamewing was captured by the Sithe, while we cultivators fought a bloody war against them. If you view it from that perspective, we’re actually all on the same side,” Ning said.

“Right, right! Your name is Darknorth, right? I agree with what you say, one hundred percent. You are spot on! The two of us are on the same side,” the Flamewing God said.

In his heart, Ning felt rather ashamed. He was swindling something with the intelligence of a child! Still, he would eventually be saving the creature

by releasing it from its prison. It could be said that he was helping it out as well.

“I’m very happy to be able to feast alongside a Chaos Primordial. Here, have another gourd.” Ning tossed out a gourd towards the Flamewing God’s direction, causing it to fly straight towards the creature. The Flamewing God was instantly excited upon seeing it, and it sent out an invisible hand of energy which caught the gourd, pulled out the stopper, and then poured out the wine.

The Flamewing God opened its mouth wide and immediately began to guzzle the wine down.

“You are seriously...” Hegemon Azurefiend felt rather speechless about all of this.

“Ah, it’s fine. I have plenty of things to eat and drink. Those Hegemons brought me quite a bit of spirit-fruit and other treasures.” Ning waved his hand, causing a large amount of spirit-fruit and other special foodstuffs to appear on the tables. Spirit-fruits were unique fruits which by some mechanism were able to take in some of the essences of the Chaosverse. Some were even used in alchemy to refine pills. Others were used to make wine, while still others could be eaten raw!

The ones Ning had just brought out were all delicious when eaten. They were unfathomably more delicious than the legendary ‘Peaches of Immortality’ of the Three Realms had been.

“Haha...” Azurefiend began to laugh loudly when he saw this. He immediately reached out with his large but scrawny hand to grab some fruit, then began to munch down on it. Juice from the fruit splattered across his mouth, and a look of contentment was in his eyes.

“Can I have some of the fruit as well?” The distant Flamewing God looked at Ning in a pitiable manner. It had already finished the wine; Ning had only given it a single gourd, after all. Azurefiend had only taken tiny sips of the wine, while the Flamewing God had guzzled it down like water. Yes, the feeling had been great, but it was over in the blink of an eye.

The Flamewing God felt as though every single one of the fruits on the

table was absolutely enticing to it, and the fragrance was driving it mad. Normally, it would've seized all the fruit for itself, but it currently was only able to beg for alms.

"Haha, I have plenty of fruit as well." Ning waved his hand, causing a large basin of fruits to fly over. This basin had a hundred different types of fruit within it, and they all emanated different yet charming auras. One of them was a large egg-shaped item... the 'verdant azuresoul' which Ning had acquired.

The large basin of fruit flew over towards the Flamewing God. Ning laughed: "You have to eat a bit more slowly this time. If you swallow it all in one gulp, I'm not going to be able to afford giving you much more."

The Flamewing God drooled as it stared at the basin of fruit in front of it. It wanted to eat all of it, with the verdant azuresoul being of especial interest. Its eyes reddened with excitement and gratitude as it turned to look at Ning. It felt as though this cultivator was the best person in the entire Chaosverse, and it immediately said: "You are absolutely the best! If I can escape this place, I'll definitely help you out." After speaking, it lowered its head and began to eat the fruit.

Ning seemed quite relaxed, but in truth he was watching intently. It has to eat it. It has to eat the verdant azuresoul!

"Wow, this is delicious! It's been a long, long time since I've had so much good food." The Flamewing God was incomparably excited. Even before the Sithe had captured it, it would only very rarely have a chance to encounter such delicious food. After being captured, its life became even duller; the Sithe hadn't given it anything to eat at all. It could only rely on its own food and drink the ordinary wine which the living beings in its estate-world created for it.

"I'm going to eat this one first. It smells so good!" The Flamewing God opened its mouth and chomped down at the verdant azuresoul, which was the most alluring.

Crunch! Crunch! The Flamewing God devoured the verdant soul at one go, its mouth filled with absolute bliss as it slowly chewed away at the fruit

before finally swallowing it down.

Ning, seated off in the distance, quickly sensed a ripple emanate from the beast. The invisible ripple had completely merged into the Flamewing God's body and permeated through its soul and truesoul.

"Success." Ning let out a sigh of relief. It had all seemed so very simple, but he had been more nervous than during any battle in recent memory.

The Flamewing God lowered its head to eat some more fruit, but it couldn't help but look up towards Ning every so often. It felt increasingly well-disposed towards Ning; the man was simply too good to it. It suddenly felt a strong sense of attachment towards Ning, as though Ning was the person it trusted and liked the most in all the Chaosverse. It didn't even realize that its truesoul had been dominated; all it knew was that it felt a sense of bone-deep love and veneration towards Ning.

As for Ning, he picked up a glass of wine and began to walk straight towards the Flamewing God.

"Master!" Whitethaw was shocked.

"Don't move too close to it." Azurefiend was shocked as well.

"Don't worry. It'll be fine," Ning said. He moved towards the six chains and began to inspect them. He had to come up with a way to break the formations securing these chains. Only then would he be able to rescue the Flamewing God. If he wasn't able to do that, then taming it would've been a pointless act.

Chapter 30: Friends For Life

“Darknorth.” Azurefiend had been seated in the lotus position, but he hurriedly jumped to his feet to pull Ji Ning back. The Flamewing God was capable of killing even Hegemons with ease; a puny Daolord would be nothing to it. How could Azurefiend not be worried?

Unfortunately, Ning moved far too fast. With a single step, he appeared right next to the Flamewing God, who turned to look at the tiny little speck that had just appeared next to it.

“Be careful!” Azurefiend and Whitethaw both held their breaths. Ning was now so close that they wouldn’t be able to intervene in time!

“You want some too?” The Flamewing God looked at the tiny human before it, a happy look in its eyes.

“From this day forth, why don’t you stick by my side?” Ning raised his head to stare at the titanic beast before him.

“Hm. Alright. But you have to give me food,” the Flamewing God said.

“No one would be able to give you this much spirit-fruit every day. However, I promise that you’ll have much more and much better food than you have in your estate-treasure,” Ning said.

The Flamewing God felt delighted for a moment, but it then turned to look helplessly at the black chains behind it. “But I’m trapped here. I want to leave with you, but I’m unable to.”

“Let me take a close look.” Ning flew over as he spoke, landing on the Flamewing God’s giant body and moving towards one of the black chains attached to its wings.

Azurefiend and Whitethaw both stared blankly at this sight. “B-but...” Azurefiend was dazed. “Flamewing is a Chaos Primordial. Why is it being so obedient? Aren’t Chaos Primordials supposed to be easily angered and moved to eat anything that approaches them?”

Taming a Chaos Primordial was an incredibly difficult task. It had a child’s intelligence and a child’s temper. It was entirely possible that it

would be happily jesting with a cultivator one moment, then devour that cultivator in the next. Not even the Sithe were able to tame it; the only thing they could do was send three Exalts to capture it with overwhelming power.

“I don’t know. All I know is that it seems to be very obedient towards my master.” Whitethaw felt puzzled as well. He transformed into a streak of light, wishing to move closer to Ning and protect him.

“Eh?” Flamewing had been squatting there while eating fruit, but now he raised his head to glare at the approaching Whitethaw in a baleful manner.

“Be good, Flamewing. He’s my Protector while the other guy is my retainer. Don’t hurt them,” Ning said from his position atop Flamewing’s back.

“Eh, alright.” Flamewing immediately calmed down and ignored Whitethaw. The terrified Whitethaw finally landed on Flamewing’s back as well.

“Master, you have to be careful. This Flamewing God might be playing nice now, but it might very well turn on you in the next moment,” Whitethaw said hurriedly.

“That won’t happen.” Ning was very calm, and his gaze continued to be focused on the black chains.

“But this is a Chaos Primordial!” Whitethaw still didn’t feel safe.

Ning shook his head. He turned to sweep Whitethaw and the distant Azurefiend with his gaze, then said: “Starting today, Flamewing shall be one of my followers as well.”

“Master, you...?” Whitethaw instantly understood.

“Darknorth, are you saying that the Flamewing God has already submitted...” the distant Azurefiend sent a stunned mental message to Ning.

Ning nodded. No longer paying any further attention to their

astonishment, he focused completely on analyzing the black chains.

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Protector Whitethaw and Hegemon Azurefiend truly were stunned by this. Ning had tamed a Chaos Primordial? This was absolutely inconceivable. Chaos Primordials were incredibly rare, and not even Hegemons knew how to tame them. The Sithe weren't capable of it either. Most likely, only the supremely exalted Autarchs were capable of such a thing!

To tame a Chaos Primordial, one had to both be lucky enough to encounter one while also having a method of taming it. Clearly, their master 'Ji Ning' had one such method which had allowed him to tame it without anyone being the wiser.

"He's tamed the Flamewing God... absolutely incredible. Simply incredible! A pity that the Flamewing God is trapped here. If he could come up with a way to release it... haha, the Flamewing God would ensure that Darknorth's reputation would skyrocket to incredible heights. Who would dare cause trouble for him? He could simply order Flamewing to attack and wipe that person out." Hegemon Azurefiend sighed in awe.

Not even Realmslord Windgrace would be able to withstand Flamewing's retribution. No one would ever dare to antagonize a major power who commanded a Chaos Primordial.

Whoosh. Azurefiend flew over as well. Now that he knew that Flamewing had been tamed, he no longer felt as worried as he had previously. "How does it look, Darknorth? Are you able to break these chains?" Azurefiend asked. If Ning was unable to breach the chains, then this would all be for naught, and the tamed Chaos Primordial would not be able to overawe the outside world.

Ning frowned as he stared intently at the black chains. The chains were actually formed from countless black threads that were woven together, each of which was covered with countless tiny formations. The formations weren't that complicated; given Ning's current level of mastery in the Dao of Formations, he would be able to resolve them with ease. The problem

was that the seeming-ordinary formations engraved upon the chains were all wrapped together and merged into a larger and even more complicated formation.

Every single chain had a suppressive effect as well as an energy absorption effect. The suppressive effect caused the Flamewing God to be completely tied down, preventing it from even changing in size.

“What marvelous formations.” Ning suddenly moved. Swish! Swish! Swish! He flew to one black chain after another, this time moving quite quickly as he carried out his inspections.

“Mmm. As I thought, all six of the black chains are virtually identical, and they also work together.” Countless thoughts flitted through Ning’s mind as he sought to come up with a way to resolve this formation.

In truth, he already had certain ideas when he saw the chains from afar. Now that he was able to inspect them closely, he completely understood how all of the formations operated. However, understanding was one thing; resolving the formations was another.

“How does it look?” Azurefiend asked again. “Can you solve it?”

“Azurefiend, you are even more impatient than I am,” Ning teased with a laugh.

“How can I not be? That’s a Chaos Primordial! If you came bring this Chaos Primordial into the outside world, you can literally do whatever you want.” Azurefiend was quite excited. “It’ll belong to you, but as your retainer...ahaha! Hurry up and tell me if you can solve it or not!”

Ning nodded. “I can!”

Azurefiend was delighted. “Incredible! Impressive indeed. My head hurts just looking at those black chains and their formations... but you think you can solve them? There probably are very few Hegemons who are a match for you in the Dao of Formations.”

Ning laughed. Of course! His mastery of the Dao of Formations had already reached the Archon level. Only someone who had relied on the Dao of Formations to complete the Daomerge and become a Hegemon

would be able to surpass him in this regard! But to do that was no easy task. No one in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance had ever been able to do such a thing!

“How long would it take, approximately?” Azurefiend asked.

“Hard to say. A few chaos cycles, probably,” Ning said.

“That’s fast! You can complete it in just a few chaos cycles?” Azurefiend praised.

Ning secretly muttered to himself. It might be just a ‘few’ chaos cycles, but that was because his Primaltwin was under the affects of accelerated time. It would be equivalent to a few hundred ‘accelerated’ chaos cycles!

These chains and their formations were extremely complex. The only reason why he stood a chance at breaking them was because he had access to many other similar Sithe formations and a very high level of insight into the art of formations, as well as the assistance of the Autarch’s stone dais. Despite that, it would still take him a few hundred chaos cycles!

Still, Ning didn’t really mind. By now, he was finding it extremely difficult to make any breakthroughs in his Omega Sword Dao. The only step waiting for him was the Daomerge! Thus, his goal right now was to focus more on other Daos, including formations, water, fire, time, space, etc. The more insight he gained into these Daos, the more assistance they would be to him in the Daomerge. All Daos shared certain commonalities, after all.

“Flamewing, I’m going to leave for a short while. I’ll be back soon,” Ning said as he flew off its body.

“Oh?” The Flamewing God suddenly raised its head to stare at Ning’s departing figure. “You aren’t going to abandon me, are you?” For some strange reason, it truly wanted to stay by Ning’s side.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back soon,” Ning said. In his heart, he couldn’t help but sigh. Flamewing was a Chaos Primordial, born with incredible strength but no true understanding of how to use it. It had never ‘trained’

before, and it didn't even notice that Autarch Bolin had used a technique to invisibly infiltrate its soul and truesoul. Still... to live a life of ignorant bliss was a form of joy as well.

Whoosh. The giant red copper gate appeared once more, with Ning, Whitethaw, and Azurefiend both flying through it.

"Why are we leaving?" Azurefiend asked while flying out.

"It'll take quite some time for me to breach those chains. Before beginning, I need to go release Ninedust," Ning said.

"Ninedust? Oh, that friend who you risked your life for in jumping into the Jادefire Realm?" Azurefiend laughed.

"Yes. We're friends for life." Ning nodded.

Chapter 31: Soon

Ji Ning sent the realmship flying towards Ninedust's location at high speeds. The silver-robed Ninedust was seated in the lotus position, surrounded by those whirling flames.

"Eh?" Ninedust noticed a streak of light moving towards him from afar. It quickly flew near him, resolving itself into the form of a rather tattered-looking realmship. Three figures emerged from the realmship, with the leader being a white-robed youth who bore a black sheath on his back. It was his good friend, Daolord Darknorth – Ji Ning.

"Darknorth." Ninedust was happy to see him, but felt mixed emotions as well. As the original instigator of all the events which had occurred in the Jade Fire Realm, the Ancient cultivators had kept him up to date on everything which had happened since. Ji Ning had successfully slain Archon Silksnow in order to rescue him! Alas, he had fallen for Archon Silksnow's last act of revenge. Hegemons and Emperors from many other realmverses had come here, seeking to take his realmship.

Thankfully, the results weren't so bad; Ning had managed to take on Hegemon Azurefiend as his retainer and force everyone to retreat! In his heart, Ninedust felt tremendous gratitude towards Ning. He knew how much risk Ning had undertaken on his behalf. A single misplaced step would've resulted in Ning's death.

"Ninedust." Ning smiled as he walked over towards the man.

"Why have you suddenly come to see me? Have you gotten bored working away on that formation?" Ninedust laughed. Ning had told him many years ago that he would have to first completely disrupt the formation-diagram in order to take control over the prisons.

"I'm here out of success, not boredom," Ning said. "You can come out now."

"Come out?" Ninedust was stunned. Was he really going to be able to escape this nightmarish prison cell?

Ning gently waved a finger. Whoosh! The flames around the flaming cage instantly parted, revealing an exit. "Hurry up and come out... or are you planning to complete your Daomerge inside?" Ning smirked.

The stunned Ninedust immediately transformed into a streak of light and scurried out.

"I'm actually out." Ninedust stood within the empty space outside the cage. He stared at himself, then at the flaming cage by his side in disbelief. "It was actually as simple as that. I came out with no fuss at all."

"Yeah, it was simple for YOU. Breaking the formation wasn't simple at all for me," Ning immediately said. He had needed both the Autarch's stone dais as well as the many records regarding Sithe formation techniques. Both were absolutely critical to his success!

"I know you worked hard. Hey, your realmship is still missing some parts, right? Take it! Consider it your wages for the past few years. Don't even think about asking me for more." As he spoke, he tossed a realmship part over to Ning.

Seeing this, Ning didn't move to decline. They were good friends; he naturally understood how Ninedust felt right now.

Clack clack clack! The realmship immediately swallowed the entire part, and some of the superficial damage began to be repaired once more. Soon, the realmship was in a state where only a few small parts of it remained damaged.

"Master, I'm almost completely repaired now. My internals are in good shape, with just a few missing parts preventing me from fully repairing my exterior," the realmship-spirit sent mentally. "However, I should be able to teleport and blink just as effectively as if I was in 100% shape."

Ning nodded. He was planning to give the realmship to the Autarch. Ning had been worried that the Autarch would be unhappy if the damage to the realmship was too great.

"This gentleman here must be Hegemon Azurefiend." Ninedust turned to look at the skinny old man standing next to Ning. Not daring to be

disrespectful, he said with a touch of respect, “Ninedust greets you, Hegemon Azurefiend.”

“Mm. It seems Darknorth and you truly are very good friends. To be able to find a few true lifelong friends on the path of cultivation is worth any price.” Hegemon Azurefiend had a rather complicated look on his face, but when he realized it he hurriedly smiled: “Darknorth kicked up quite a storm when he came here to rescue you. Quite a few Hegemons and Emperors came.”

Ninedust felt rather moved by all this. He truly had been the cause of this great affair.

“Darknorth, now that I’m out, shall we leave the Jadefire Realm?” Ninedust asked.

“I still have some business here in the Jadefire Realm. I can’t leave just yet,” Ning said.

“Oh, then I’ll leave on my own.” Ninedust laughed. “My greatest goal right now is to complete my Daomerge. I need to go out and experience more things. If I stay here with you in the Jadefire Realm, it’ll be detrimental to me with regards to the Daomerge.”

Ning nodded. “Alright. Be careful out there.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t be so unlucky as to need rescuing again.” Ninedust suddenly walked forward and gave Ning a tight hug, then turned and left. “Train hard. I’m planning to start my Daomerge soon. We brothers must both succeed in our Daomerges!”

Ninedust’s voice still echoed in the air, but he himself had already vanished. Ning could sense the determination in Ninedust’s voice when the latter spoke of the Daomerge.

“Succeed in the Daomerge together, eh?” Ning turned and went back the way he came. Friends for life didn’t need to actually be together for their entire lives; it was enough for them to keep each other in their hearts.

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Time flowed on like water. Ninedust continued his adventures through the outside world, encountering quite a few strokes of karmic fortune. As for Ning, he remained within the Jadefire Realm and focused on analyzing those black chains and their formations. But of course, he had also swept the prison regions clean of all the treasures it held... and this time, he truly made a killing!

Although he had acquired a few treasures from threatening the Hegemons and Emperors of the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, the combined value of those treasures was perhaps at best comparable to a single Hegemon's networth. The treasures within the prison regions, however, were far more numerous... and Ning had swept through all of them.

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In the blink of an eye, another five chaos cycles went past.

Within a dark region in the Great Dark which was incomparably distant from the Flamedragon Realmverse. This was a dark void which held an enormous triangular region within it that was filled with dazzlingly beautiful palaces, each of which emanated blinding golden light. This was the residence of one of the truly supreme leaders of the cultivator civilizations... the home of Autarch Titanos.

Autarchs were extremely difficult to track down. Autarch Titanos was one of the easier ones to find, because he almost always resided within his estate.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. A howling sound could be heard coming from within a private room inside the largest, most towering palace in the region.

A skull-sized gray globe which was covered with countless runes was levitating up and down in the air, emitting a strange whooshing sound as its internals continuously changed.

"How beautiful. How lovely." The bald, black-robed old man next to the globe was staring at it greedily, his golden eyes filled with joy and the two fleshy antennae on his head quivering in excitement.

“It truly is perfect. Just a small amount of power is needed. Once the insides of the globe continuously guide the power and transform it, its able to unleash absolutely terrifying levels of destructive power. Sithe frabrication techniques were simply incredible. Although we had an overwhelming advantage in individual power during the Dawn War, we still nearly ended up being defeated by the Sithe. The Sithe truly were and are incredible. To this very day, I still don’t fully understand their technologies.” The bald old man stared greedily at the orb, as though he was staring at the person he loved the most.

“Heh heh... last time, I wasn’t careful and put in too much power, wrecking this treasure. Thank goodness that I, Titanos, am awesome. Although I still don’t fully understand this thing, I was still able to repair it! Ahahaha...” The bald old man stared at the continuously changing runes on the surface of the globe, feeling increasingly delighted as he did so. His gaze was able to see through everything, allowing him to observe the intricate transformations occurring within the gray globe.

These transformations were absolutely beautiful to him. Suddenly, the gray globe lifted up into the air and floated in front of him. The fleshy antennae on top of the bald old man’s head reached out to gently stroke the globe.

“Although I managed to successfully repair one, I’m still not able to create them from scratch.” The bald old man shook his head. “The Sithe’s underlying foundation of knowledge remains far superior to that of our cultivator civilizations. I can’t even imagine how long it would take for us to fully repair all of their shattered treasures.”

The bald old man waved his hand, causing the gray orb to vanish into thin air. Whoosh. He pushed open the door to the private room, then strolled out with his long black robes dragging behind him.

“Master.” When he reached the palace gates, an azure-robed youth immediately came to greet him. The youth said joyfully, “Master, you repaired it?”

“Of course! When have I ever failed? Don’t you know who I am? I’m an

Autarch!” the bald old man said smugly.

“Right, right,” the azure-robed youth said hastily.

“Xian, my boy... that Daolord Darknorth from the Flamedragon Realmverse asked me to help out just a few dozen chaos cycles ago, yes? I told you I’d be done soon!” the bald old man said smugly.

“It was pretty quick, this time.” The azure-robed youth nodded. This was one of the faster response times for Autarch Titanos.

“Well, I’m off to the Flamedragon Realmverse,” the bald old man said, then waved his sleeves. Whoosh. Space rippled before him like water. The bald old man stepped into the rippling space, then disappeared without a trace.

Credits

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